

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1479.—VOL. LVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 5, 1891.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[RUPERT CAME SODDENLY ON A YOUNG GIRL, SITTING QUITE ALONE, BY THE PATH.]

TWO MISS DANES.

CHAPTER IX.

RUPERT TRACEY felt a vague sense of relief when Honor Dane and her mother had actually left Brighton. He had been introduced to the heiress by a mutual friend: one of those prosperous, contented, middle-aged women, who, if they have no children of their own to make plans for, nearly always take to arranging marriages for their friends.

Mrs. Middleton was nearly fifty, and she really felt quite a maternal affection for Rupert. His fortunes were at a desperate crisis, and unless he married money it was clear he would soon be ruined. Honor Dane was rich, and, besides that, she came of a good old family. She had no father or brother to inquire too closely into Rupert's means, and her mother was the most unmercenary of women. If poor Tracey must needs sell his coronet to the highest bidder, he could not do better than propose to Miss Dane.

The introduction once made, the young

nobleman spent a good deal of time in Hove Gardens. Mrs. Middleton was judicious, she did not follow him there to see how his wooing progressed. She did not worry him by impatient questions as to how he liked Miss Dane. She had set things in train, and was content to await the result.

Rupert had fought rather shy of his kind friend lately. He did not want to face Mrs. Middleton until he was prepared to tell her his decision, and, truth to say, he found it hard to make up his mind.

He loved the grand old place and title which had unexpectedly become his through a series of unlooked for deaths. He would have given up a great deal to free his estate, and be able to hold his own among his equals; but, unfortunately, he had imbibed from his mother very old fashioned ideas of marriage. In a word he believed in love, and he was quite certain he should never be in love with Honor Dane.

He had no fault to find with her, he thought in the first weeks of their acquaintance. She was quiet and composed. She seemed well-educated, and intelligent; but, to his mind,

there was nothing attractive about her. She seemed to him intensely ordinary. He never saw her glad or sorry, delighted or disappointed. She moved about more as a mechanical figure, than human flesh and blood. Not until the Wednesday afternoon, when she heard of her grandfather's death, had he ever seen her excited—and poor Rupert found that the change he had so much desired to witness in Miss Dane made her simply repulsive to his sensitive mind. When he heard her almost rejoicing that the one life between her and Dames Croft was removed; when he listened to her scornful hint, that if she were not on the spot, poor May might actually rob her,—he felt, as poor Mrs. Dane expressed it when speaking to him of her child, "ashamed."

Was there anything really in Mrs. Dane's words, "never do evil that good may come"? Had she guessed he was thinking of wedding Honor for her fortune, and means to warn him he would regret it. Rupert could not say, but he was conscious, as he left the house, of a strange change in his feelings. He had gone there almost resolved to

propose to Honor, thinking that after all to be might be an idle dream, and marriages founded on mutual liking and esteem were the most successful. He went away feeling he would rather earn his bread as a city clerk, than live in wealth and luxury as Honor Dane's husband!

It was early still when he left Hove Gardens, barely four o'clock, but Rupert felt in no humour for calls on his acquaintances, or going anywhere where he was likely to meet anyone he knew. He wanted time to think over things. Of one fact he was resolved. He would not marry Honor, but all the rest was still conjecture. Should he give up his idle, aimless life, and take to honest hard work? or should he give up the battle, yield everything he possessed to the creditors of the estate, and live in exile on the small income which had come to him from his mother, and brought in some three hundred a-year?

He walked down the steps on to the beach and hired a boat. He was passionately fond of the sea, and felt that upon its restless waters he should at least secure what he so longed for, solitude. He never even thought of going home to put on his flannels; but, just as he was, in his faultless fitting tweed suit, he sprang into the boat and took the oars.

"I may be gone two or three hours," he said to the owner, a grey-haired man, who had received a good deal of Lord Tracey's patronage in the last few weeks, and now took the information quite casually, merely touching his long forelock significantly, and muttering,—

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Off at last. Really it was not an hour since he had knocked at Mrs. Dane's door, intending to propose to her daughter; but poor Rupert seemed to have lived at least a week since that. Those sixty minutes had changed the whole current of his life. He had meant to marry Honor, and "make the best of things," but he simply could not do it now. To be tied to a woman who could rejoice at an old man's death, who could gloat over the sorrows of a girl younger than herself—why, it was impossible!

After all, as Rupert told himself, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness, a good many people had two or three hundred a-year, and were not unhappy. If his uncle and cousins had lived he should have faced the problem two years ago. Surely this brief span of idleness, of fashionable life, could not quite have unfitted him for work.

"If the mortgagee forecloses, and the old place comes to the hammer, there will be enough to pay everyone. There may even be a trifle over to add to my resources. If only I had not left the army I should do well enough; but it's no use regretting that step; and, after all, I never had a taste for military life. I shall find a niche somewhere, I dare say; and if people laugh at such a poverty-stricken peer as I shall be, why, it will be easy to drop my title!"

He had rowed beyond Kemp Town, and now pushed towards shore. He called to a man he knew by sight to make the boat secure, and promising him a gratuity on his return, he clambered up the beach, and soon found himself on the cliffs, which lead to Rottingdean.

How quiet and deserted the place seemed. Away in the distance he could see the last houses of Kemp Town. Then there seemed nothing but isolated cottages and broad, rugged cliffs.

No doubt to the rear inland was a growing colony; but Rupert did not think of that, it was the sea view which attracted him—the restless tossing waves.

He had gone perhaps half way to Rottingdean—in the distance he could get a glimpse of the little village—when he came suddenly on a young girl.

She was sitting quite alone by the path, but she did not look in the least like a tramp. She leaned against the trunk of a tree as though for support; but she had not the appearance of having travelled far.

She was dressed in a pale blue zephyr, trimmed with white embroidery. A broad-brimmed hat lay at her feet, leaving her head bare. It was a very pretty head, covered with fair hair, almost too pale for golden, but looking very bright and picturesque in the sunshine.

She had a clear complexion, and a charming pink colour in her cheeks. She was rather short, and her thin figure reminded one almost of a kitten's in its rounded plumpness.

Rupert thought of Greuze's pictures, and decided the fair stranger only wanted a crook to make an ideal stage shepherdess; but what in the world was she doing there, curled up under a tree on the high road between Brighton and Rottingdean? Had she lost her way?

It seemed impossible, since it was a perfectly straight path without a single turning. Was she in distress? Hardly, for although her eyes were closed her whole expression was one of tranquil contentment.

Rupert gave one more glance, and then the truth dawned on him. She had gone to sleep, probably tired out with her hot walk.

While he stood there thinking what a pretty picture she made, and wondering if it was his duty to arouse her, the girl suddenly stirred, opened her eyes languidly, and then blushed rosy red, as she discovered she was not alone.

"You have been to sleep!" said Rupert, cheerfully, feeling that as she had caught him in the very act of admiring her, it was better to confess his offense. "You can't think what a pretty picture you made!"

She was not at all displeased at the compliment. Putting on her hat, she rose and looked anxiously round on either side, then she said to Rupert almost piteously,—

"I do believe they have gone home without me!"

"I have walked from Kemp Town, and I met not a single creature. May I ask who are the guilty?"

She smiled frankly.

"Why, the girls, of course. I am staying with them, and we started to go for a long country walk. I got so tired I declared we must sit down here, and they all agreed. I suppose I went to sleep; but they ought not to have gone on without telling me, when I am quite a stranger here!"

What a pretty, innocent child she was, and how naively she confided her troubles to him. Rupert began to feel quite interested in his shepherdess.

"Do you think it possible I could replace your friends?" he said, courteously. "I know this neighbourhood well, and am quite willing to act as your guide; besides, I may be an acquaintance of your friends. I am intimate with a good many people in Brighton."

"They don't live in Brighton. Dr. Carleton's house is a mile beyond Rottingdean. Grace and Mary are his daughters; we used to go to school together, and now I am spending a month with them."

"Well, I know Rottingdean tolerably well, and if you will trust yourself to my guidance we shall soon be there. Perhaps, when you are in the village, you will remember the way to Dr. Carleton's?"

She was young and pretty, or it might have occurred to Rupert Tracey that the way to Rottingdean was a straight line, and anyone not an idiot could find it for themselves. He never thought of this; first, because he was very much taken with the pretty stranger; secondly, because he felt indignant with her friends for deserting her.

"Then you do not live in this part of the world?" he asked her, presently.

"Oh, no. My home is at Brixton. Do you know it at all? It is dreadfully dull and commonplace!"

"I have never been there," said Lord Tracey, fearing his ignorance would shock her, "but I have always heard it is very convenient. There are a great many trams and omnibuses, aren't there?"

"Heaps; but no one lives at Brixton except

clerks and those people. I often beg Auntie to move, but she is old-fashioned, and does not like changes."

The slighting emphasis on "those people" was intended to show Rupert that his companion was very high in the Brixton aristocracy, but, unfortunately, it failed. He was wondering at that moment whether she was an orphan since she mentioned only "Auntie."

"I suppose you don't live with your aunt always?" he said, carelessly. "Your parents could not spare you?"

"Aunt Bertram is the only relation I have in the world," said the girl, with a touch of pathos in her voice. "She is very kind, but it is not the same as having a mother."

"Of course not. And is your name Bertram, too?"

"Yes. Alma Bertram. I always wish I had been called something different. It's dreadful to have A. B. for my initials. It sounds just as though I was an advertisement."

Rupert smiled.

"I think we ought to choose our own Christian names when we grow up, but you have no cause to complain of yours. I never heard a prettier one than Alma."

They walked into Rottingdean, and then Alma thought Dr. Carleton's house lay to the left. That it turned out to be to the right was of course her misfortune and not her fault.

Rupert made no complaint at the extra allowance of her company he thus received. In his present mood this simple child (as he thought her), with her pretty face and naive speech amused him. She was such an utter contrast to Honor Dane the woman he ought to marry.

Rose Villa proved a pretty double-fronted house standing in its own garden. Two girls were leaning over the gate, and they seemed much relieved at the sight of Alma.

"Mother has been scolding us for leaving you," said Grace. "But you know, Alma, you did look so happy I had not the heart to wake you."

"We were coming to meet you as soon as we had had tea," said Mary. "You must come in and have some now. It is quite ready."

For the first time Miss Carleton's eyes fell on Alma's companion. She looked at Alma for an introduction, and finding it not forthcoming, turned herself to Lord Tracey.

"I am sure I have met you at Mrs. Middleton's, but I can't remember your name."

It came back to Tracey then that at a large afternoon party he had noticed this very girl. She had not seemed to know many people, and feeling sorry for her he had shown her some pictures and fetched her a cup of tea.

Mrs. Middleton had rallied him afterwards on his attention to her little protégée, and told him Miss Carleton was a music teacher who was glad to play at "Afternoon At Homes" for moderate remuneration. It all came back upon his mind like lightning, and he put out his hand promptly.

"I fancy Mrs. Middleton has so many social duties that she neglects a few of them. I am sure she forgot to introduce us at that party, Miss Carleton."

"Will you come in and see mamma?" asked Mary, pleasantly.

She was a nice, intelligent-looking girl, and no doubt felt grateful to him for coming to her friend's assistance. As she had met him at Mrs. Middleton's there could be no harm in asking him to enter.

Mary, who was singularly matter-of-fact, never dreamed that he was her patroness's special friend, Lord Tracey, of whom she had often heard. Lord Tracey would never have been at leisure to look after her comfort at that afternoon party.

"I shall be delighted," said Rupert, simply, "but first let me repair Mrs. Middleton's neglect. My name is Tracey."

"He must be a brother or cousin of Lord Tracey," said Mary to her mother, when half-

an-hour later Rupert had taken his leave. "What a nice face he has. He seemed struck with Alma I thought."

"Oh! my dear, I hope not," said Mrs. Carleton, quickly. "I like your little friend very much, but she ought to marry someone able to keep a good firm hand over her, not a romantic young man like Mr. Tracey."

Mary opened her eyes.

"Why, mamma, I thought him so sensible."

"I daresay he's clever, but he would just give Alma her own way in everything. The child had much better marry a sober, middle-aged man rich enough to treat her like a toy, and old enough to manage her properly."

"Mamma! And yet you say you like Alma. Aren't you rather hard on her?"

"No, dear. She is very pretty, but she is only a butterfly. She hasn't enough in her to satisfy a man of Mr. Tracey's refinement; and I fear she's not clever enough to manage on a small income, and I don't think he's rich."

"Why not?" demanded Mary.

"Rich people expect so much. Mr. Tracey made himself perfectly at home, though we didn't even have out the best china. No, my dear, he seems a nice young man, but I hope he won't think of Alma."

CHAPTER X.

FORTUNATELY, the Rectory at Little Otterley was a large and commodious house, while the Clives were rich enough to make an extra guest no tax on them.

The two prettiest rooms were speedily made ready for May, another was found for Mr. Clifford, and his hostess assured him that even if Sir Kenneth Dane accepted the invitation sent him there would be a chamber to spare.

May went straight to bed, but the Clives and Mr. Clifford sat up till past midnight discussing the terrible rudeness of the heiress.

"Goodness knows," cried the Rector, frankly, "I did not expect much of John Dane's daughter; but I thought, at least, she would refrain from insulting her aunt. My wife and I hoped to persuade May to stay with us for several months; but how are we to press her to remain within reach of this horrible young woman!"

"Perhaps the heiress won't stay long at the Crofts!" suggested Mr. Clifford. "I should not think the neighbourhood would welcome her very warmly."

"Any one will welcome her who has a needy son or brother," said Mrs. Clive, more bitterly than she often spoke. "We must expect that. I daresay my Lady Monkton will be at the Crofts directly after breakfast to make friends with the heiress. Honor Dane will have the chance of taking May's lover as well as her name and home."

"I don't fancy Miss Dane will be an easy prey to fortune hunters. She looked able to take care of herself," observed the lawyer.

"I was sorry for her mother," confessed the Rector's wife, "she seemed ashamed of the whole proceedings. I think she is far more kindly disposed towards May than the heiress herself!"

The next day the Rectory was besieged with callers. Every one who had been at all intimate with Sir Geoffrey came over to inquire for his daughter. With a solitary exception, no one from Monkton Castle called or sent.

May kept her own rooms and saw no one, but most of the inquirers contrived to get a glimpse of either the Rector or his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Clive were cross-questioned so often about the heiress that they were fairly weary.

"She is not in the least like the Danes, and I think she has no small idea of her own importance. Of course she is a great heiress; but pity the man who marries her!"

This was what Mrs. Clive was stung into saying at last to the mother of three poverty-stricken sons. The lady drove away in a remarkably bad temper for the thrust had gone home.

On Friday evening as they sat at tea a young man walked up to the Rectory, his boots a little dusty with the five miles from Otterley Station, himself a little weary from the long walk. He carried a small bag in his hand, and certainly did not arrive after the manner of a distinguished Baronet; but Mr. Clive, who sat opposite the window, caught sight of his face and started from his chair, exclaiming—

"That's Sir Kenneth Dane!"

Another moment and he was shaking the new comer's hand in the hall and offering him a hearty welcome.

"Why in the world did you walk? I would have sent my pony trap, only I did not know the train; but there are always flies at the station!"

"Only two," said Kenneth, pleasantly; "but when I had managed to capture one of them I found a lady with three small children had fixed all her hopes on it, so there was nothing to do but to give it up to her."

"I should have known you anywhere, you are so like Sir Geoffrey!"

"Did you know my father, Mr. Clive?"

"No; he had gone to Australia before I came to these parts. I am very glad you were able to come down, Sir Kenneth. It seems only fitting that one of his own name should follow my poor old friend to his last home. Will you come and see your room, or join us now at tea?"

Kenneth preferred to get rid of some of the Sussex dust before encountering his hostess.

Mr. Clive went back to his wife with a smile on his face.

"He will do!"

"My dear John," said Mrs. Clive. "What do you mean? You can't have found out much about Sir Kenneth in this time?"

"Do you remember Sir Geoffrey as he was when we first knew him, Kate?"

"A young widower. Looking almost too grave and troubled for his age, though we all felt his wife's death couldn't be much real sorrow to him. Yes, John, I remember!"

"Well, you will think our old friend has come back to life just as he was then. I never saw such a marvellous resemblance. Sir Kenneth might be his son."

"Is he married?"

"My dear! Could I ask him in five minutes' conversation?"

"I hope he is," said Mrs. Clive, anxiously. "If he is really nice, and Miss Dane thinks so, I shall pity him terribly!"

Kenneth came downstairs very quietly. He was introduced to Mr. Clifford and the Rector's wife. He told them very briefly that until the day before he had never known of his relationship to the master of Danes Croft.

"My mother was very young when she was left a widow," he said, simply, "and she could not bear the idea she might be asked to give me up to my father's family, and so she never told Sir Geoffrey of her return to England, and left me in ignorance of my connection with him."

"Are you her only son?"

"Yes, and her only child by her first marriage; but she did not remain a widow long, and I have two half-sisters."

"And a stepfather?" asked Mrs. Clive.

"He died this last spring. Mr. Menteith was a very worthy man, and devoted to my mother. I am afraid I was a great vexation to him. He never could understand why I would not go into his office, and learn to make money. He was very liberal to me in giving me a good education, and paying for my articles, but we never understood each other, and the Chesnuts has seemed much more home-like to me since his death. It is really my sister's property, but my mother lives there still."

"And do you live with her?"

"Oh, no!" Kenneth smiled at the idea. "I have been in lodgings for seven years. You see Mr. Menteith was very rich, and as I knew I was never likely to have more than a moderate income, I did not want to get into luxurious habits. My mother frets very much at my being so poor, but I tell her I am content."

"And now you will have Woodlake, and five hundred a year; I have seen pictures of it, and it is such a pretty place, Sir Kenneth, though, of course, it does not come up to Danes Croft."

"I have been meaning all this time to ask you about the mistress of Danes Croft. Am I likely to see her? My mother charged me with a message I should like to deliver in person."

Mr. and Mrs. Clive exchanged glances, and Kenneth understood vaguely that his speech had troubled them.

"Pray don't think I intend to intrude upon Miss Dane!" he said, quickly. "At a time like this, I daresay she has no wish to see an unknown cousin; but, if it had been otherwise, I should have liked to give her my mother's message."

"The fact is, Sir Kenneth," said the Rector, "you have placed us in a dilemma. There are two Miss Danes! The late mistress of the Crofts, Sir Geoffrey's daughter, and the present heiress, his grandchild. We were wondering for which of them Mrs. Menteith's message was intended."

"Sir Geoffrey's daughter! My mother has taken up the idea that she would be alone in the world, though Mr. Chepatow told me her father had saved a fortune for her!"

"Had saved! Yes; but he lost every penny of it in speculation a week before he died. May has not a shilling of her own, and Honor Dane's first act on coming to the Crofts was to insult her so cruelly that the poor child had no alternative but to leave her house that very night. May is here with us, and you shall certainly see her before you return to London. Honor you will probably meet to-morrow at the reading of the will."

"The will is like so much waste paper now," observed Mrs. Clifford, "since poor Sir Geoffrey had nothing to leave."

The funeral was fixed for three o'clock. Before that hour a very highly perfumed note without a black edge, was brought to Sir Kenneth. It was signed "Honor Dane," and invited him, with much cordiality, to change his quarters to the Crofts, and be her guest for as long as he remained in the neighbourhood. Kenneth returned a polite answer that he was leaving for London that evening, and so could not avail himself of his cousin's hospitality. His note was hardly despatched before the study door opened, and a girl came in who at first sight reminded him of Alma. Only at first sight. A second glance showed him the difference. Alma's hair was flaxen and her eyes light blue, his new acquaintance had hair of the darkest golden hue, and her eyes were blue as sapphires. There was no trace of colour on the fair skin, her broad open brow, her regular features, even the carriage of her head conveyed more expression of strength than Alma's doll-like prettiness. It was a beautiful girl who stood before Kenneth, but the face was sadder than any he had ever seen.

"Are you my cousin?" and he drew a chair forward for her, "it is very kind of you to let me see you."

Once, twice, she tried to speak, but the words died on her lips. Kenneth placed her in the chair as though she had been a little child, and then said gently,—

"My mother told me to ask if you would come and stay with her? She fancied you would not make your home at Danes Croft, and as she lost her husband only a few months ago, there would be nothing at her house that could jar upon your grief. I have two sisters not much older than you. They are not your cousins really for they are

Menteiths, not Danes; but I know they would try to make you feel at home."

The tears rolled down May's cheeks. "It is very good of your mother, Sir Kenneth; but I cannot go and 'visit' anywhere! Don't you know? Haven't Mrs. Clive told you? My dear father lost all his savings, and I must work for my own living!"

If she expected Kenneth's manner to change she was mistaken. He seemed quite indifferent to her loss of fortune. Had she been an heiress, like her niece Honor, he could not have spoken more considerably.

"I still think if you will come to my mother she would make you feel at home. Surely after such a loss as yours, it would be better to go away than to remain here to see a strange face at the Croft?"

"And Honor Dane hates me," said May, sadly. "Do you know she said she hurried here lest I should steal any of her property? As though I were a thief."

"Does she mean to remain at the Croft?"

"I don't know."

"If she does I do not think you will be happy at the Rectory, though I know Mr. and Mrs. Clive hope to keep you here."

"I shall never be happy anywhere, and I could not stay here. I mean to earn my own living. Since Mrs. Menteith is so kind do you think she would find me something to do?"

"You don't look strong enough," he urged. May shook her head.

"I must work, or eat my heart out thinking of the past. Sir Kenneth, can't you understand I want to work so hard that when I go to bed I shall feel too tired to think. I want my days to be so busy that I have no time to remember."

It was a wish he had known himself since his parting with Alma. His face was graver than before, but he only said simply,—

"I understand. I agree with you that hard work is the best cure for trouble. But I wish with all my heart you could be dissuaded from seeking any."

"There is no disgrace in work. Perhaps you think there is?"

"I don't. I honour all women who work, but I regret there should be a need for it."

"My mother worked," said May, a little gravely. "She was governess to John Dane, that is how papa came to marry her."

"And I work," said Kenneth, cheerfully. "I am managing clerk to a lawyer, and I assure you, May, I spend eight hours a day at pretty constant work. It is not because I despise those who labour that I want to dissuade you from joining their ranks."

"I would rather die than live on charity," said Sir Geoffrey's daughter. "If Mrs. Menteith could find me something to do I should be grateful to her."

"What would you like?"

"Anything. Teaching, companionship, needlework. I would rather serve in a shop than let anyone taunt me as Honor Dane did last Wednesday. Only a week ago I was quite happy. I had a beautiful home, and the kindest father in the world. All my life things had gone smoothly with me, and then in one day all I prized went from me. My whole future was shipwrecked."

"Take courage," said Sir Kenneth, solemnly. "The clouds will roll away yet from your path, May. Your father is spared the pang of seeing you suffer from his speculations, and depend upon it it is not bricks and mortar that make our home. Someday you will love another home as dearly as you do the Croft."

"You have not seen it," and there came a look of yearning regret into her beautiful eyes. "and you have not seen Honor Dane. Do you know, Sir Kenneth, when I think of her reigning there I could almost wish my dear old home had been burnt to ashes before she crossed its threshold."

Sir Kenneth took her hand in his.

"I shall be obliged to go back to London without returning here. Mr. Clive will have

my mother's address. I want you to promise me, May, to write to her before you take any definite step about your future."

"You speak almost as though you cared," she said, in amazement.

"I do care. I have sisters of my own, you know, and I know how I should hate the idea of their making any rash struggle for independence; and though we are strangers, May, we are yet first cousins. On my father's side you are my only living relation (I don't count the heiress, you see), and I should be grieved if you drifted out alone into the battlefield of life."

An hour later he left the Rectory to join the long procession which followed Sir Geoffrey to the grave.

All through the funeral service May's face haunted him. It was so sad and desolate, and yet withal so beautiful.

When he saw Danes Croft he understood better his cousin's passionate affection for her home. He felt a decided aversion to the new mistress of the Croft which an introduction to her did not lessen. On the other hand he was agreeably surprised in her mother. He put Mrs. Dane down in his own mind as a good-natured, kindly sort of woman, who was utterly ruled by her imperious daughter.

"I want to speak to you?"

It was a strange whisper to reach him as soon as the reading of the will was over. Surely the lady was old enough to have stated her wish openly. He could not imagine what Honor Dane's mother could possibly have to say to him in private. But she looked so anxious that he could not refuse her request.

Miss Dane was saying farewell to the neighbours, who were now returning home, and Kenneth, much surprised at the widow's mysterious signal, followed her from the library across the hall to a little room where Sir Geoffrey had been used to consult his steward and attend to other business.

Mrs. Dane had evidently inspected the little den beforehand, for as soon as they had both entered it to Sir Kenneth's amazement she turned the key in the lock, calmly placed the former in her pocket, thus making him entirely a prisoner, and then said anxiously,—

"Sir Kenneth, it's not right. It's not fair. That poor child at the Rectory can't be left without a penny. I won't have it."

"It is not right," he agreed, simply, "but I fear we can't prevent it."

"I wanted Honor to give up the Croft," said poor Mrs. Dane, dejectedly, "but she won't hear of it."

"You could hardly have expected her to agree to such a plan."

"But I am very rich," observed Mrs. Dane. "My income is twenty-five thousand pounds, and I would have given Honor the whole of it if she would have listened to me. Sir Kenneth, she mustn't stay here. You must prevent it."

"My dear lady," said Ken, much bewildered, "no one can prevent your daughter staying here. It is her own house."

Mrs. Dane answered him with a wail of pain.

"It will mean death," said the poor creature, frantically. "Sir Kenneth, Honor is all I have, my very all. And if she stays in this terrible place I shall lose her. She will die before my eyes, and what good will the money do me then? I tell you there is a curse upon her while she remains at the Croft. The curse of a dead man!"

(To be continued.)

IN Brompton Cemetery, London, one hundred thousand bodies lie in twelve acres; and in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery almost a quarter of a million lie in less than seventeen acres, some to the number of seventy in the same pit. And London is only a larger example of what exists at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, and, in a lesser degree, in many country churchyards.

ALETHEA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER XL.—(continued.)

"RICHARD says they are dragging the mill-pond for my Arthur," said the young mother, absently. He threw himself in there, perhaps, for he was a proud-spirited, sensitive boy, you remember. I say he was, for he may be dead now. I did not notice him when he bowed to me in such a pretty, gallant way, as he sat on the gate-post, but my heart yearned over him, and I could have caught him up and smothered him with kisses! But he didn't know that. He thought I was ashamed of him, or had ceased to love him. And I am his murderer—his murderer, when I would have died for him! Oh, my murdered boy!"

The last words were uttered in the same absent, quiet tone as the first.

"You never murdered him, my lady," cried Alison, fondling the hand she held. "He knew you loved him. It is more like that Lord Waldemere put him into the mill-pond, it drowned he is. The Marquis hated you, my lady," continued the woman, eagerly, seizing upon her new idea as it had been an inspiration, "and he threatened Arthur, you know. His lordship, with his awful temper, would as soon have put the lad out of the way as not, just to spite you!"

"The Marquis hates me and threatened my boy!" repeated Miss Wycherly, trying to awaken her remembrance. "Ah, yes, I remember now. Why did I not think of it before?"

She spoke more in her usual tone, and Alison was so greatly encouraged by the change for the better that she launched forth in a strain of invective against Lord Waldemere, accusing him of having brought about the disappearance of the missing child, and of being capable of any wickedness towards her mistress.

The result of her denunciations was as might have been expected.

Miss Wycherly resolved upon an immediate audience with his lordship.

With an excitement that appeared feverish, she arose from her chair, and started for the door, but was recalled by her attendant, who smoothed her dishevelled hair, rearranged her dress, and begged her to be calm lest she should expose her secret to her guests.

The caution had due effect.

By a powerful exercise of her strong will, Miss Wycherly resumed her usual manner, and quitted her rooms with a stately though uncertain step.

She made her way down the grand staircase to the door of the drawing room which was ajar.

A quick survey of the apartment revealed to her the various groups therein, but Lord Waldemere was not among them, and she stepped out upon the portico.

He was not there, nor in the conservatory, whither she next proceeded, and she then turned towards the library, preparatory to seeking him in the garden.

The library was well lighted, and as she opened the door and looked in, the first object that met her gaze was the gentleman of whom she was in search.

He was seated by a small sofa-table, looking over a volume of maps.

Alethea walked in, closed the door behind her, looked around to assure herself that no third person was in the room, and then she swept towards him with her usual haughtiness.

His lordship arose at her approach, greeted her with a very low bow, scanned her face for some token of grief, and then politely placed a chair for her use.

"Perhaps I intrude," he said, closing the volume he had been studying. "You would like the library to yourself, I doubt not, Miss Wycherly."

"Stay!" she commanded, putting out her

hand to detain him. "I came here in search of you. I wish to speak with you!"

"I feel honoured, Miss Wycherly," he responded, in a mocking tone. "Until now, you have avoided me, and given me to understand how unwelcome my presence is here. I am pleased that you have relented in my favour!"

"Peace!" she said, sternly. "What have you done with my boy?"

The question was so abrupt that Lord Waldemere was startled by it. He coloured, looked at her uneasily, and exclaimed,—

"What have I done with him? Then you acknowledge his relationship to you, Alethea Wycherly? I don't see why you should come to me with such an inquiry!"

Miss Wycherly repeated her question with increased sternness.

"Is he not upstairs?" returned his lordship. "I heard his voice one evening in your room. How should I know where you have kept him, since?"

"True," said Alethea, suddenly recollecting that the Marquis had not betrayed any knowledge of Arthur's change of residence, and believing that he could not have known it. "I think I was mistaken in coming to you. You did not know where he was!"

"Has he gone out walking and remained so long?" inquired the Marquis, despising himself for his affectation of ignorance.

"No, he is lost. He has been gone three days—three whole days! Richard has searched everywhere for him, and he thinks my boy may have been drowned in the mill-pond!"

She spoke so wearily that his lordship's heart was touched, but it hardened again at her mention of Richard Layne.

"It is not at all probable that he has been drowned," he remarked, carelessly.

"I don't know. He was so sensitive, my poor Arthur. He thought I had ceased to love him. I have killed him!"

She looked up so sadly that his lordship's countenance involuntarily relaxed, and he advanced a step nearer to her.

He understood her allusion perfectly, for, as the reader will remember, he had been the task of cheering the half broken-hearted boy.

There was no doubting her great suffering now.

Unable longer to keep on the mask of indifference, her bright eyes, startlingly pale face, and unnatural calmness, revealed to his lordship unsuspected depths of feeling.

He saw that her reason trembled on its balance, that her tortured heart could not bear an additional feather's weight of woe, and that but little was needed to change her strange quietness into an eternal sleep.

This was the hour to which he had looked forward.

This was the state to which he had hoped to subdue her.

There was no haughtiness now in her dark eyes; there was no scorn now upon her lips; no disdain in her manner.

Beautiful even in her anguish—for grief could not mar the perfect chiselling of her features—she resembled a lovely creation in marble.

As Lord Waldemere looked upon her, there was no exultation in his glance, no triumph in his heart.

The revenge for which he had soborned was detestable in his sight.

Its promised sweetness had turned to bitter gall.

His revengful feelings fled before that picture of woe, and his hatred turned upon himself.

"You loved your son very much, Alethea," he said, more to escape his own thoughts than to question her.

"He was the apple of my eye—the life of my life—the soul of my soul!"

"He was the dearest thing to you of anything on earth, I suppose?"

As he asked this question, his lordship

noticed a faint tinge of scarlet in her clear cheeks, but it faded almost instantly, and she answered, with that unnatural quietness that had alarmed him, as well as Alison,—

"There is one dearer—my lost boy's father. That is, he was dearer—"

"I understand you. Of course, Richard Layne cannot be as dear to you now, since he has engaged himself to Lady Ellen Haigh," answered the Marquis, somewhat bitterly, yet subdued by her manner. "And Arthur is everything to you now!"

"Yes, he is everything to me. Living or dead, he is everything to me. You used to threaten me with your vengeance, and say you would strike my heart through my boy, but I knew you could not do it. It was reserved for me who loved him so to destroy his innocent life. If you ever had cause to hate me, you are now avenged!"

His lordship made no reply.

"Don't you pity me?" she inquired, with a smile that brought tears to his lordship's eyes, in spite of his efforts to steel his heart by remembering his past sorrows. "I pity myself. It's a sad thing to lose a son like Arthur. Why, I had my plans all laid to take him to the Continent, and live with him in some small German town where you could never find us. I intended to own him for my son there. I had my money affairs all arranged, and was only waiting for you and the rest to go away. And then we should have left the country—my little son and I—and not have come back again until he had grown to manhood!"

"You speak as though he were lost to you for ever, Alethea. You will find him again. He will be restored to you to-morrow, so sure as I live!"

Miss Wycherly shook her head and made some rambling remarks about the virtues and beauty of her son, remarks that stung her listener to the very heart.

"Your mind must be wandering, Alethea," he said. "Do you forget you are speaking to me—your enemy?"

The stricken mother smiled pitifully.

"Don't look at me so!" cried his lordship, with emotion. "I beg you not to look at me in that way, Alethea. Your boy is safe and happy. I stole him from you!"

Alethea arose slowly, looking at him with horror.

"It was you, then," she said. "I am innocent of his blood. It was you who killed him! Merciful Heaven!"

She took a step forward, and then fell into his outstretched arms, devoid of consciousness.

CHAPTER XL.

What! we have many goodly days to see;
The liquid drops of tears that you have shed
Shall come again, transformed to orient pearl;
Advantaging their loan, with interest,
 Oftentimes double gain of happiness.

Shakespeare.

NATALIE, on entering the grounds of Wycherly Castle, turned her steps towards the eastern tower, which stood up dark and silent in the gloom of the early evening.

The drawing-room, library, conservatory, all the state apartments, flashing with light, made the haunted to her more gloomy in appearance than usual. But Natalie was sufficiently acquainted with Miss Wycherly's apartments to know that behind those shrouded windows lights gleamed upon scenes of Oriental luxury, and she hastened towards them, half confident and half doubting whether she would be well received.

She began to fear that Miss Alethea and the Lady Leopolde would welcome her but coldly, because she had gone away with her husband to the Fens without informing or consulting with them; but she nerved herself with the assurance that they were the only friends she had in the world, and that at the worst she

could but appeal to them for aid and comfort, and they could only cast her off.

She found one of the long French windows in the morning-room imperfectly closed; she entered, gained the private staircase, and ascended to Miss Wycherly's rooms.

As she passed into the inner chamber through the concealed door in the wall, Alison sprang up from a chair with a faint scream, gave a surprised look, and exclaimed,—

"How you startled me, Miss Natalie. I thought news had come—I mean, where have you been so long?"

"I have been a journey," answered Natalie, evasively. "Can I see Miss Wycherly?"

"I think not. My lady is down in the drawing-room, and she wouldn't like to be called. My lady is very gay," added the waiting-woman, furtively brushing a tear from her cheek, "very gay indeed—poor dear! That is—dear me! I cannot talk somehow to-night, only I meant to say she can't see you. Did you leave the window below as you found it, and close the entrance to the staircase?"

Natalie replied in the affirmative.

"Then, perhaps, you wouldn't object going to the west tower, where the Lady Leopolde's rooms are. My lady can't see you. I expect her up every minute, so you'll excuse my hurrying you off."

The visitor was somewhat puzzled at Alison's strange manner, perceiving that the woman was nervously anxious to be rid of her presence in Miss Wycherly's rooms, and permitted herself to be conducted through the ante-chamber to the corridor, into which she was ushered, the door being closed behind her.

Natalie had never before visited at the Castle at so early an hour, and she did not know how to spend the time that must intervene before the retirement of the Lady Leopolde.

She had come earlier than usual, expecting to have a long interview with Miss Wycherly, who, she knew, spent much time in her own rooms, and in her present disappointment she was momentarily tempted to go down into the Castle grounds.

But she did not dare to pass through Miss Wycherly's rooms again, and nothing remained for her but to make the best of her situation.

She looked up and down the corridor, and then proceeded through the passage that led to the grand staircase; at the top she paused and looked over into the great hall below.

She heard sounds of gay laughter from the drawing-room, and distinguished the silvery tones of the Lady Leopolde and the voice of Lord Templecombe, who, if his gaiety were considered, had apparently neither crime nor sorrow upon his soul.

Two footmen in livery sat on either side of the drawing-room door, in readiness for any demand that might be made upon their services, and their low whispers also reached the ears of the listener, who stole softly away, fearful of being seen by them.

Proceeding towards the western tower through passages and corridors, she came upon the great picture gallery and a secondary staircase, which she remembered as leading down to the library and breakfast room.

As she paused here, a faint cry came to her ears—the cry uttered by Alethea as she sank fainting into Lord Waldemere's arms.

Natalie was startled at this unexpected sound, but as no confusion or excitement followed it, she persuaded herself that she had been mistaken, and quietly continued her way to her intended destination.

Arrived in the passage upon which the apartments of the Lady Leopolde opened, she began to fear that she should encounter her ladyship's maid. It was impossible that she could remain in the passage without discovery, however, and she boldly resolved to venture into the room.

The door yielded to her gentle touch, and she softly entered Leopolde's boudoir, the light of which was toned down to a pleasant twilight. No one was there, besides herself

and she passed into the inner chamber, and sat down among the shadows.

Here she remained some time, startled by every footfall in the passage without, and continually apprehensive of the entrance of her sister's maid. But at length, with a sudden thought, she arose and went into the dressing-room, laid aside her bonnet and Sheffield shawl, and threw herself in a reclining attitude upon the luxurious couch which seemed to invite her to repose.

It was a pleasant little nook she had chosen for her retreat—everything being in readiness for the night toilet of its lovely proprietress. A silver lamp burned steadily upon the marble-topped dressing-table; chalcids and facons of Bohemian glass or rare porcelain with silver stoppers, surrounded it by delicate profusion; a dressing-case, with ornate silver fittings stood open; and upon a small table near at hand reposed an open jewel-box of purest ivory, and the rays of the lamp-light fell upon gleaming opals, flashing diamonds, milk-white pearls, &c., which reposed upon cushions of ruby velvet.

As Natalie's wandering gaze rested upon these things, she arose and looked at them curiously.

"How beautiful!" she murmured admiringly. "It must be pleasant to have such things!"

She took up one of the diamond bracelets, turned it over and over, delighted with the flashing of the stars of which it was composed, and then, baring one of her shapely arms, clasped it upon it.

She was so pleased with its effect that an opal bracelet was placed above it, and the other arm was encircled with three jewelled ornaments; the jewels in each being different.

She then wondered how she would look under the tiara of diamond stars, and, to settle the question, tried it on over the soft bands of her golden hair.

Then she pinned on a row of brooches, beginning at her throat and terminating at her belt, and covered her fingers with glittering rings.

The effect was resplendent.

She did not know that it was considered bad taste to wear more than one kind of jewels at the same time, and surveyed her reflection in the full-length mirror that constituted the door, with considerable admiration.

It was singular that, with such sorrows and disappointments as had fallen to her lot, she should retain sufficient elasticity of spirit to take pleasure in her present child-like performance, but it was nevertheless a fact that she did so.

It might have been that she desired to escape her own thoughts, or to beguile away the moments of her tedious waiting, but, whatever her motive, she smiled upon the bright image that met her gaze in the mirror, hardly able to realize that it represented herself.

But the smile was followed by a sigh.

"Jewels are not for me!" she murmured.

"They make my eyes look dim. I have shed too many tears, I think, to wear diamonds well. They are appropriate to Leopold, for they cannot outshine the lustre of her purple eyes or the bright gold of her hair. I look tamer than she, I think. These things," she added, "could never satisfy me. I should not like to wear them, and I never want to put such things on again. They would not look well in the country home that I should like better than all castles or palaces—"

She checked herself hastily, and began laying aside the borrowed jewels, carefully restoring them to the place from which she had taken them.

When she had removed the last ring from her finger, and the last brooch from her corsage, she drew a long breath of relief and returned to the couch, quite satisfied with her brief experiment as a grand lady.

The hours wore on, until the pretty ormolu clock upon the boudoir mantel piece struck

twelve, and a footfall was heard in the inner chamber.

Natalie started up expectantly, but instantly decided that the step was neither light nor gentle enough for the Lady Leopold; a moment later a second step was heard, and the voice of her ladyship sounded upon the listener's ears.

She heard her moving about the room softly and approach the dressing-room, and she stepped into an open wardrobe just in time to escape observation as Leopold entered.

She had not had time to entirely close the door of the wardrobe, and through the crevice thus afforded she obtained a good view of her brilliant sister.

Leopold was fairly radiant in a peach-coloured robe, which sloped away from her beautifully rounded shoulders—they might have served as models for a sculptor—and with a diamond necklace reposing against her faultless throat, and similar jewels flashing from hand, arm, and brow.

Her ladyship took possession of a low, easy-chair, permitted her maid to remove the jewels from her person and deposit them in the casket, exchanged her evening dress for a blue cashmere dressing-gown, and then placed herself in the hands of her maid.

The girl removed her evening slippers, for a pair of dainty white velvet ones, over which trailed sprays of blue forget-me-nots, and then with brush and comb smoothed out the golden curls of her mistress, letting her hair fall about her like a glittering shower.

"Your ladyship never looked lovelier than you did this evening," said the girl, brushing her hair with tender care.

"Nonsense, Maria. You know I don't like flattery," responded the Lady Leopold, yet with a pretty blush, as if remembering that another had expressed the same opinion. "Ah!"

The exclamation resulted from her having obtained a glimpse of the hat and shawl she had given Natalie, and which lay half concealed by a chair.

In a moment she comprehended that Natalie was near at hand.

Recovering her self-possession as she reflected that her maid knew nothing of the disposition of those tell-tale articles of attire, she said, quietly,—

"There! that will do for to-night, Maria, I see you are sleepy; you may go!"

"I beg your pardon for yawning, my lady. I didn't mean to, I'm sure. Shall I get out your ladyship's night-dress?"

She moved towards the wardrobe, but Leopold's quick eyes had caught sight of Natalie's blue robe, and she replied in the negative, saying, carelessly, that she would wait upon herself.

The maid then withdrew.

Lady Leopold followed her to the door of the boudoir, looked it noiselessly, and then returned to the dressing-room.

Moving towards the closet, she drew open its front, and said,—

"Come out, Natalie. I'm alone!"

While she was speaking her eyes met those of the intruder, and she held out her arms, and Natalie sprang into them, embracing her with sisterly affection.

"Where have you been so long, Natalie?" asked Lady Leopold, drawing her to the couch; "You do not know how you grieved me by disappearing so suddenly. Aunt Alethea inquired for you at the farm-house where she had placed you, but could get no trace of you. Have you been back to Afton Grange?"

"No, Leopold. I could never return there—at least, under present circumstances. How did you suspect I was in your wardrobe?"

Leopold silently pointed to the hat and shawl.

"Ah! I forgot to take those into the closet with me. I should have been more careful!"

"How thin you look, my dear sister," said her ladyship, fondly, yet sadly. "You look

as though you had suffered much since you left us!"

"I have. You asked me where I had been, dear Leopold. I have been away with my husband, Lord Templecombe. You look incredulous, but I can easily explain myself to your satisfaction. Upon the occasion of my last interview with him at the Castle—it took place in the haunted glade, where the fountain is—he offered to acknowledge me if I would go away and study to fit myself for the position. I promised to do so, for what other course was open to me?"

"It was not well to trust him though!"

"It was not—as events proved. The next morning, as he had enjoined me, I met him at the station, although we did not appear to know each other. There was a gentleman with him—Sir Wilton Werner was, I believe, his name—but this Baronet did not accompany us. Vane bade him good-bye, followed me into the carriage, and took me to a country seat called the Fens that belongs to Sir Wilton!"

"I have heard of it. I think it is a dreary spot, situated in the midst of a marsh, is it not?"

"It is upon the edge of a marsh, with an open moor on one side, and a river on the other. Oh, it was so dreary there! I was on the point, a dozen times, of writing to you, yet I thought it best to wait. Vane left me there the same day, with no companion save the keeper—a deaf old woman—and her granddaughter, a pretty, wild creature, whose intellect is not right."

"That was Vane's first trip to town—or what he gave out as such," said the Lady Leopold, musingly.

"He sent me books and clothing, but I mustn't forget to tell that he made the old housekeeper think he was Sir Wilton and I Lady Werner. The deception was easy, for she had not seen her master since his boyhood. But the truth came out one day, and I wrote to Vane, and he came to the Fens—oh, heaven!" added the Earl's young wife, her voice faltering, and her eyes filling with tears.

"What is it grieves you, dear?" asked Leopold, sympathizingly.

"He came there and tried to murder me!"

"To murder you? Impossible!"

"Oh, no, it is not!" and with sobs and tears Natalie told her sad story, excusing her husband as much as she could, yet detailing the facts truthfully.

Leopold listened with a blanched face, not daring to doubt the story, enfolding her sister closer, as if to protect her from farther danger.

"So your old lover, Hugh Fauld, saved you from drowning, dear Natalie. He ought to be rewarded—"

"No, no," interposed Natalie, blushing. "Hugh is well off. But do not let us speak of him, Leopold. I want to tell you of a singular adventure I had while at the Fens. Linnet, the housekeeper's granddaughter, took me with her one day to a favourite haunt of hers—a pretty bird's nest of a cottage upon the moor, several miles distant. It was a lovely place, but deserted and all run wild. What do you think it's name was?"

"I'm sure I do not know!" responded Leopold.

"It was Mount Rose!"

"Mount Rose?"

"Yes, the spot where I was born, and where my poor young mother spent her happiest days!"

Lady Leopold expressed her surprise at this singular discovery.

"How did you discover that it was really Mount Rose?" she asked.

"I found there a packet of letters—here they are!" and Natalie took them from her pocket and placed them in Leopold's hand. "Oh, sister, mention is made in one of them of a marriage certificate! What if it should turn out that I am your legal sister, and that

I, too, have a right to bear my father's name?"

"I wish that it may be so, Natalie. I could then respect and venerate my father's memory as I did formerly. Show me the letter of which you speak?"

Natalie selected it from its fellows, and Lady Leopold read it in silence again and again.

"You are right, dear," she said, at last. "No other construction can be placed upon these words. There must have been a marriage between my father and your mother, but whether fraudulent or not remains to be seen. If there were a legal marriage, the proofs would have been retained, and my father would have been sure to put them among his important papers. If any proofs be in existence, they are without doubt in his room at the top of the tower!"

"Will you go there with me and look, Leopold?" asked Natalie, eagerly.

"Without a moment's delay, I am so anxious to know the truth as yourself, dear sister," and Leopold's lovely face expressed her truthfulness and sincerity. "Let us hasten!"

She took up the small silver lamp and, signed for her sister to follow her.

With noiseless steps they quitted Leopold's rooms, passed through passages and corridors, mounted staircases, &c., until they gained the closed room that had belonged to the late Earl.

Its appearance was the same as when the sisters had last sought it together, for no one had entered it since.

Looking the door, that their investigations might not be intruded upon, the elder sister led the way into the inner room, saying,—

"You remember, Natalie, that we searched the furniture. I think we shall do best to look over the desk thoroughly."

She let down the flap that covered the numerous "pigeon holes" in which papers were stored, set down the lamp upon a little bracket made for the purpose, and then commenced their search.

Every paper was carefully examined, every letter opened, every nook and crevice looked into, but all to no purpose.

Other letters were found containing references to a marriage, but the actual proofs were wanting.

"Don't let even a simple bill or receipt escape your scrutiny, Natalie," said the Earl's acknowledged daughter. "Oh, if we can only find something that will give you a name equal with mine, that will clear the fame of Amy Afton, and prove papa to have been only weak, not false and wicked!"

The aspiration seemed vain.

"We may as well give up, Leopold," said Natalie, at last in a tone of discouragement.

"No. We will again search the furniture!"

They proceeded to the task, with an energy and zeal that would have done credit to a detective, examining picture backs, books, &c., but to no effect.

Lady Leopold returned to the still open desk and said,—

"Somehow, I cannot help having a conviction that, if there be any proofs of such a marriage in existence, papa would have hidden them in his desk. Can there be any secret drawers in it?"

"No, the space is all accounted for!"

Not satisfied with Natalie's decision, Leopold commenced rapping the walls and back of the desk with her tiny knuckles, shaping her head as she did so.

"It's of no use, Natalie," she sighed. "We can't find them!"

At that moment her hand struck against the side of the desk, a faint click was heard, and a piece of wood flew from its position, revealing a very thin cavity in which reposed three papers.

She caught them up eagerly, opened them, and scanned their contents.

The desired proofs were found.

"Here they are, Natalie, my own, own sister," said Lady Leopold, clasping Vane's wife to her breast. "Thank Heaven!"

They embraced each other and wept together.

This first burst of emotion passed, they studied the documents they had found.

The principal one was the certificate of a marriage between Leopold, Earl of Templecombe, and Amy Afton, spinster, and the names of the contracting parties were signed, followed by the signatures of witnesses.

A second document comprised a certificate of Natalie's birth.

A third was a rough draft of a will, bequeathing five hundred pounds per annum "to Natalie, daughter of Leopold, Earl of Templecombe, and Amy, his wife;" but it was not so well constructed as to be legal, and there had been no witnesses to its authenticity.

Evidently, his lordship had intended this as a rough draft to guide his solicitor.

These three papers were all that were found, but to the sisters they were amply sufficient.

"I can now look upon my mother's picture without reproach, and upon my father's without bitterness," said Natalie, in a tone of heartfelt joy. "Oh, Leopold, dear sister, Leopold, do you accept me wholly as your sister now?"

"Wholly and entirely, Natalie. Henceforth you must be known as Natalie Wycherly, and I am sure—but I forget. Vane cannot refuse to acknowledge you now. You shall be acknowledged as papa's younger daughter tomorrow to our guests. The bequest that papa indicated in this unfinished will shall be paid over to you yearly."

"No, no. I cannot take it from you!"

"As if I could not spare it! I have no right to the whole, and papa did not intend I should have it all. I shall be the richer, with mamma's fortune, and so much from papa, but you won't mind that, Nattie, for Vane has more than I. I wonder what Aunt Althea will say when I tell her of our discovery. She thought so much of papa, and I am sure she has grieved a great deal since we learned that you were my sister, and bearing your mother's name. I am sure this will be a relief to her."

"Let us go, to—do. Aunt Althea this moment."

"She will not like it, I fear. The last time I visited her she requested me to announce my coming in future. And it's so late now, past one. She would be angry if we awakened her, even upon such an important affair as this."

"I did not think it was so late," said Natalie, apologetically. "This discovery has so excited me. It seems as though it could not be true. Leopold, I hope it will not prove that I am dreaming!"

"There is no danger of that—else I am dreaming, too. Let us look over the papers, again!"

They did so, their excitement decreasing, and, when they had finished the second perusal, they wept softly in each other's arms.

"See, Natalie," said Leopold, her purple eyes looking like dew-covered pansies, "papa seems to be smiling upon his daughters from his picture. Can you not look at it now without hatred or wrath?"

In answer, the younger daughter looked up at the portrait smiling through her tears, and her glances were as affectionate as those of her more favoured sister.

"How had you better meet Vane?" asked Lady Leopold, thoughtfully. "Shall I request him to be in the library in the morning, and I take you to him, introducing you as Lady Natalie?"

"The Lady Natalie?"

"Yes; poor child, you scarcely know your own name. Or shall I introduce you as Lady Templecombe?"

"As neither, dear Leopold. He thinks me dead, and I do not care to come upon him so unprepared. It may be that when he sees me

come back to life, he will welcome me kindly. He must have suffered some remorse.

"He has shown none."

"Perhaps not, but he must have suffered, Leopold. A man cannot commit a terrible crime all at once and then dismiss it from his thoughts as of no consequence. Perhaps he cannot sleep at night—I must see him, Leopold. I will tell him who and what I am, and there shall be peace between us!"

"Will you be willing to live with him after all that has passed?"

"It will be hard to do so," answered Natalie, turning pale; "but I am his wife. I will not condemn him for a hasty impulse, doubtless repented of a thousand times!"

"You have a noble, forgiving spirit, dear Natalie. But let us go down to my room. Take care of these precious papers."

"You take care of them," said Natalie, putting them into her sister's hands. "They will be safer with you."

Leopold accepted the charge, and they left the rooms together, proceeding to her ladyship's apartments.

Natalie walked with a prouder carriage and a more erect bearing than usual, feeling more worthy of her own self-respect, now that she had ascertained her birth to be stainless and noble, and her lineage so honourable and exalted.

Neither of the sisters noticed a form that flitted on before them in the darkness, or suspected that their words in that upper room had been overheard, but such had been the case.

The unseen listener was the Earl's valet.

(To be continued).

LETTY'S LOVE STORY.

CHAPTER XIX.

POOR LETTY!

The ghostly ivy fingers still continued to tap against the window, while the wind sobbed and sighed like some soul in extreme pain—typical, perhaps, of the poor crushed hearts within.

Letty said never a word. Her eyes gazed straight before her at the opposite wall, and her slim fingers were traced lightly the one in the other, while Marcia leaned her head on her hand, and kept her eyes fixed gloomily on the floor.

She had told her tale, and sorrow made her egotistical. That her sister was struggling in even deeper depths than she herself, she would never for a moment have believed.

And yet there was raging a tumult in poor Letty's proud soul, of which, Marcia's less impassioned temperament was incapable. At one fell blow the beautiful fabric of her love dream had been destroyed, and the ruins lay at her feet, defiled beyond all possibility of recognition.

Not without a struggle would she resign her faith in Hubert. At first there was the chance that Marcia might have been the victim of some gigantic error; but alas! each scrap of evidence fitted in too well with Letty's own knowledge; and, at last, she came to the conclusion, that there was no longer any possibility of doubt.

Hubert had met Marcia on the very day when he had come into the dairy to ask his way to Highfield. Letty knew that he had remained there a month, therefore his departure tallied exactly with the date given by Marcia, for he had told Letty, he had been a week at Highfield before he saw her.

The following winter he had spent in London, and then the death of his aunt had called him to Ellesmere Grange. All this fitted in exactly with Marcia's story, and was confirmed by her accounts of the night when she had found her way to Aldham Mount.

Letty recalled with a burning blush of

shame, how she herself had met Hubert Edesmere, to whom the place belonged!

"And what are your plans for the future?"

"Plans!" Marcia echoed. "I have none." "But you surely will not remain here?" "Not a thousand times, no!"

Lettice did not speak again for a few minutes. She had been rapidly revolving matters in her mind, and the conclusion she came to was that—for the present at any rate—she would conceal from her sister her own connection with Hubert Edesmere.

Later on it might become necessary to avow it, but at this moment its only effect would be to tear open afresh poor Marcia's still bleeding wounds. The question to be thought of now was, what they both had better do.

"Listen, Marcia," she said, bending forward, and lowering her voice. "It seems to me our plan is to leave this house at once—this very minute. If we wait till the morning our opportunity may be gone. Can we get through the front door?"

"Certainly. I have a key in my pocket that will unlock it as well as the garden door."

"Good, we will lose no time. Go to your room, and put on your outdoor garments, and then come back to me, and I will be ready to accompany you. Be quick and as silent as you can!"

Marcia nodded and obeyed. The stronger will still triumphed over the weaker one, as it always had done in the old days.

Swiftly and silently Lettice put on her hat and jacket, took up her travelling bag, and then turned out the contents of her purse to see how much money she had.

Four five-pound notes and some loose gold and silver, her quarter's salary almost intact. That would be enough to keep herself and Marcia from starvation for some time to come.

After that she went outside into the passage and waited—perfectly calm and self-possessed, although it seemed to her that she had received her death-blow. She dared not think of Hubert—to do so would be like dragging the sword out of some mortal wound, and hastening the inevitable end.

So long as there was something to do, so long would she courageously face the future. And she had Marcia to think of first—Marcia's wrongs to avenge before she thought of her own.

Slowly and listlessly Marcia came down the corridor to meet her, and they both descended the stairs. Once Lettice fancied she heard footsteps following them, and she paused a moment, her head uplifted in a queenly challenge that would not stoop to fear. Indeed, in her present mood, she would have defied the combined strength of Barker and his mother, and, perhaps, have conquered both by sheer force of will.

But her fancy had played her false—there was no one following, and a few minutes later the two girls stood out in the damp night air. Luckily it had ceased raining, but wet showers were still falling from the trees, as the wind swept in amongst the branches.

The garden door was difficult to open; the lock was stiff and rusty, and for a few minutes defied their united efforts to turn it. At length however it yielded, and as Lettice found herself outside, a murmured "Thank Heaven!" broke from her lips.

"Do you know how far we are from London?" she asked Marcia, whose arm she had drawn through her own.

"About eight miles I think—or it may not be quite so much."

"Can you walk so far?"

"Oh, yes, if it is necessary."

"Come along then, and when you feel tired tell me, and we will rest. You can lean on me as much as you like."

Marcia made no reply. So far as Lettice could see she did not take the smallest interest in where they were going—and this was in truth the case. Lettice had told her to come,

and she had obeyed; for the rest she cared as little for one place as another.

Never, as long as she lived, would Lettice forget that walk through the wet lanes, and along the muddy highroad, in the damp midnight darkness. The roads were soft and heavy from the recent rain, and by and by, when the clouds drifted across the sky, faint gleams of starlight mirrored themselves in the black pools of wet lying in all the hollows.

Not a creature met or overtook them, and for some distance they seemed to be tramping between bare wastes of common, on the fringes of which solitary houses were here and there dotted.

After a bit, the houses grew more frequent, and finally merged into a village, and by this time steady bars of light were beginning to cross the cloudy east. It had grown cold and raw, and Lettice stopped a minute to knot a silk handkerchief round Marcia's throat. The elder girl submitted without remark to the loving little attention, and then the two resumed their way, while the fan of dawn gradually spread itself all over the sky, and London loomed before them, dark, misty, forbidding.

Many a time, in the far off days at Woodside, had the two girls talked of London as some golden El Dorado into which it might, at some distant future, be their good fortune to enter. Many a time had they pictured its wealth, its glories, its magnificence, building up in it a splendid castle from the bright web of their girlish fancies. There the mighty heart of the world pulsed—there lived poets and painters—there beauty smiled, crowned with roses, and there genius wore its chaplets of laurel leaves.

And this was how their dreams were fulfilled! Weary and footsore, friendless, save for each other, the one seared with the ineffaceable brand of an eternal shame, the other weighed down with bitter wrong, they made their way into the great city. Sin and sorrow behind them, and before them—what?

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT WAS IN THE SEALED PACKET?

MARCIA did not help her sister with any suggestions, though, as she had lived in London for nearly twelve months, and this was Lettice's first visit to the metropolis, it might have seemed natural that she should give the elder girl the benefit of her experience.

"Do whatever you think best," she said, with a gentle smile, when she was appealed to. "It will sure to be right."

Her trust in her sister was boundless; and, indeed, Lettice went to work in this emergency with a quiet, self-reliance that quite justified this trust.

The season was pretty well over in London, and lodgings were reasonably cheap. The two girls got a couple of rooms in Brunswick-square for twenty-five shillings a week, which Lettice decided was the utmost she could afford to pay; and then, on the afternoon of the day following their escape, we find them seated together disengaging their future prospects—or rather, Lettice was disengaging them, for Marcia did not even put in a "yes" or "nay."

She listened with a far-off look in her eyes that Lettice could not understand, and her cheeks were as white as the May flowers used to be in the hedges round Woodside.

"Go and lie down for an hour, dear," said Lettice, presently, as she noticed her abstraction. "You are tired and require rest. I will sit by you and think over our plans meanwhile."

Marcia passively obeyed, but whether she slept or not it would be impossible to say, for she kept her face turned away.

By and by Lettice herself left the sitting-room for the bedroom—she wanted to be alone. Up to the present she had resolutely

pressed waters to the tears, and then she had them be.

She trusted sun of cold and all the wrongs.

She ling had tained sake of thing e.

Sudden envelop mere's direct contain the wor.

Marc attempt "Yo said to her hands story t aftern.

"Th Marcia finish mother.

"A justice began develope its coo.

A v them; and h "M

"p ment to yo and wealth.

Ma her the r

"in cre

far w and perfo to yo

Co bega

"Ink occur Sept sever call land may Tre dau die trie

dec inn su d pas and her the wor the sab self

ju my Tr on me Lu

pressed back the flood of despair whose bitter waters threatened to drown her soul, but now the tears forced themselves through her closed lids, and try as she would she could not keep them back.

She had loved Hubert so well—she had trusted him so thoroughly. He had been the sun of her life, without whom existence was cold and grey and cheerless. And he, out of all the world, had done her sister this bitter wrong!

She got up hastily, and began with trembling hands to take out the few articles contained in her travelling bag—more for the sake of distracting her attention than anything else.

Suddenly her eyes fell on the large blue envelope she had found behind Miss Ellesmere's picture at Ellesmere Grange. It was directed to Marcia, and perhaps it might contain some important message; at any rate she would lose no time in giving it to her.

Marcia took the package without even attempting to open it.

"You had better see what is inside," she said to Lettice, who thereupon briefly told her how the envelope had come into her hands; and also gave her the outlines of the story told her by Sir Wilfred Aldham on the afternoon of its discovery.

"The name of Ellesmere is fatal to us," Marcia said, with a bitter smile, as Lettice finished speaking. "First it wrecked my mother's happiness and now mine."

"And mine as well!" Lettice might with justice have added, but she refrained, and began to break the seal of the big blue envelope in her hand, wondering the while what its contents would prove to be.

A very little while enabled her to master them, and then a change came over her face, and her eyes flashed with passionate triumph.

"Marcia," she said, in a thrilling whisper, "prepare yourself for a surprise. This document will make all the difference in the world to your future. It is Miss Ellesmere's will, and she makes you the heiress of all her wealth. Yes—every farthing comes to you!"

Marcia turned slowly round, and looked at her wonderingly, not quite comprehending the meaning of her words.

"To me!" she repeated, in amazement. "It is incredible, impossible!"

"Incredible—yes. Impossible—no! So far as I can see, the will is properly signed and witnessed, and it is expressed with perfect clearness. Listen, and I will read it to you."

Controlling her voice as best she could, she began as follows,—

"This is the last will and testament of me, Isabel Ellesmere, of Ellesmere Grange, in the county of W—, made this fourteenth day of September, one thousand eight hundred and seventy-five. I give and bequeath my estate called Ellesmere Park, together with all the landed property, or investments of which I may be possessed, absolutely to Marcia Helen Trevelyan, commonly called Marcia Rufford, daughter of the late Otto Trevelyan, who died in W— goal, on suspicion of having tried to murder his wife.

"And I, at the same time, wish to publicly declare, that the said Otto Trevelyan was innocent of the crime of which he was accused; and that I, myself, in an access of jealous passion, stabbed his wife, Mary Trevelyan, and then allowed the husband to be apprehended, because I was cowardly, and feared the consequences of my mad act. As all the world knows, Otto Trevelyan died in his cell the day before his trial, and it was for my sake he kept silence, and refused to clear himself by telling the truth.

"Therefore, I render this tardy act of justice to his daughter, in constituting her my heiress. And, if the said Marcia Helen Trevelyan shall die before the age of twenty-one, then all the lands and monies of which I may be possessed, shall vest in her sister, Lettice Trevelyan, commonly called Lettice

Rufford, at present residing at Woodside, in the county of Warwickshire. And supposing neither the aforementioned Marcia Helen Trevelyan, nor her sister Lettice Trevelyan shall survive me, then I give and bequeath all the monies and lands of which I may be possessed, to the trustees of — Hospital, to found and endow a ward for women and children, to be called the Ellesmere Ward. And I declare this to be my last will and testament.

"ISABELLA ELLESMERE.

"Signed by the said Isabella Ellesmere in the presence of us, who at her request, in her presence, and in the presence of each other, have hereto subscribed our names as witnesses,

"RICHARD PALMER.

"REBECCA SPINKS."

From this document, it was clear that by some means or other, Miss Ellesmere had penetrated the secret of Mrs. Rufford's disguise, though she had been content to respect it, and had carefully refrained from divulging her knowledge.

And now both these women were dead, and the mantle of their wrongs seemed to have come down to their descendants.

For a little while after, Lettice ceased reading, there was a silence, which neither of the girls seemed inclined to break. Both were trying to realize the difference that this document made in their positions; but it was Marcia who finally spoke.

"Lettie!" she said, in a trembling voice, "do you think we ought to take advantage of this wicked woman's injustice? So long as she lived, she was content to keep mother and the world in ignorance of the truth, and when she dies, she thinks she can make things right by defrauding her rightful heir of his inheritance?"

Lettice started up with crimson cheeks. The same idea had suggested itself to her, but she beat it determinedly back.

"With that we have nothing to do now," she said, resolutely. "If Hubert Ellesmere had not perpetuated the wrongs his family have worked on ours, we would have scorned to take this money, but now, it seems to me, Heaven has put into your hands an instrument for punishing his treachery, and you must use it."

"You mean you wish me to take the property?" faltered Marcia, hiding her face in her hands.

"I do!" firmly. "That is to say, if you have really a legal claim to it. Of course, it is possible this will may not be what lawyers call valid; but I will soon put that to the proof," she added, and a few minutes later she had left the house, the precious blue envelope and its contents in her pocket.

She intended to find out a lawyer, and get his opinion regarding the will.

Lawyers are not far to seek in the neighbourhood of Bedford row, and Lettice finally found herself in a dark, dingy office, littered from end to end with papers, the presiding deity of which was a short, wiry, dark haired man of about five and thirty, who eyed his visitor with more than professional curiosity. His name was Ferroll, as our heroine had discovered from the brass plate on his door.

With a few words of explanation—as much as she deemed necessary—she handed him the paper, which he proceeded to peruse. Twice over he read it, then he gave it back to her.

"Not all the courts of justice in England could upset that will," he remarked quietly. "That is to say if it can be proved that it is really in the handwriting of the testator. Are the witnesses still alive?"

"I do not know, but it will be easy enough to ascertain. Then I may take it for granted that my sister—the Marcia Helen Trevelyan mentioned here—can really claim the Ellesmere property under this will?"

"Certainly. There can be no doubt about it."

"Thank you," she said, as she paid him his fee. "I may be glad to consult you later

on, when we have decided exactly on what we shall do in the matter."

"I shall be happy to place my professional services at your disposal," he returned, courteously, opening the door for her to pass out.

It was not often his dingy office was graced with the presence of such a young and lovely client; and after she left, it seemed to him that the very small modicum of sun that ever found its way there had unaccountably disappeared with her.

As she walked back, Lettice would have found it difficult to analyse her sensations, for they were of such a varied character.

One idea, however, was slowly taking definite shape in her brain. Hubert must marry Marcia, and by the lever which she now possessed, she would be able to force him to do this much justice to the woman whom he had wronged.

Herself, and her own wrongs, she put resolutely on one side. She was clear-sighted enough to see that Marcia still loved the man who had treated her so cruelly—yes, loved him in spite of all.

Lettice's lip curled scornfully. She could not understand this dog-like affection, that turns to kiss the hand that beats it. Her nature was of a different order, and though her love had been fifty times deeper than her sister's was capable of, yet every fibre of her whole being was stirred to passionate resentment as she thought of Hubert's conduct.

Marcia listened attentively to her account of her interview with the lawyer, and at its conclusion she said,—

"What do you intend to do next?"

Lettice was thoughtfully silent for a few minutes, leaning her head on her hand, and gazing straight before her at the "daffodil sky," where the sun was going down in a bed of golden haze. When she spoke there was no sort of hesitation in her tone.

"I shall instruct this Mr. Ferroll to act as our solicitor, and take immediate steps for proving the will."

"And afterwards?"

Lettice's breath came thick and fast, her eyes flashed with a sense of coming triumph.

"Afterwards we will go down to Ellesmere Grange, and you shall take possession of it as its mistress!"

The next morning Mr. Ferroll was surprised by another lady client who came into his office with a far less assured mien than the one of the previous afternoon; in fact, Marcia trembled so much that she had to ask the lawyer to get her a glass of water before she could summon sufficient courage to state the object of her visit, and even then she did it in a singularly roundabout fashion.

"My sister called upon you yesterday concerning a will," she began, her nervous fingers twisting themselves restlessly in and out of each other. She paused, and looked at him questioningly. "Do you remember?" she added.

The solicitor put his hand to his mouth to conceal the faint smile curving his lips.

"Yes," gravely enough, "I remember."

"Well," proceeded Marcia, "I am the person mentioned in the will to whom Miss Ellesmere leaves all her fortune. Now, I want to give everything I have to my sister. Do you understand?"

"I think so," returned Mr. Ferroll, looking however, slightly mystified. "You mean you desire to make a will yourself, constituting your sister your heiress?"

"No, no! not a will, because I want to make it plain that from the very first I refused to have anything to do with the money. Can I not make a deed of gift, or something of that kind?"

"Certainly, that is if you are over age. I mean over twenty-one."

"I am twenty-two—nearly," she said, her fingers still twitching nervously in her lap. "Will it take long to prepare the necessary document?"

"Not very long. Shall we say a week?"

"Not so long as that, surely! Oh, I cannot wait so long!" clasping her hands with a piteous appeal that the lawyer could not fathom, and which yet moved him strangely. "Will you not be able to get it ready sooner?"

He looked at her doubtfully, and a deep, shamed blush rose to her cheeks under his scrutiny.

"I daresay you wonder why I am in such a hurry," she exclaimed, speaking rapidly and nervously; "but I have a very sufficient reason, though I can't explain it to you!"

She paused in confusion so deep as to be absolutely painful. Ferroll, in genuine pity for her distress, did his best to put her more at her ease.

"My dear young lady," he said, soothingly, "if you really are anxious to have this deed executed immediately, I will put other matters on one side in order to get it prepared as soon as possible. If you will call late in the evening two days from this date, it shall be ready for you to sign."

She breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank you, you are very kind. Then I will come the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXI

"WEARY OF BREATH."

MARCIA kept her promise, and at the time appointed entered Mr. Ferroll's office, where that gentleman proceeded to read over to her the document he had prepared.

"Now, all that remains for you to do is to sign it in the presence of my clerk and myself, and then we will put our signatures as witnesses," he said, in a businesslike tone. "But," he added, immediately after, "I should like to be assured first of all that you understand the importance of the step you are taking. The Ellesmere property is, I believe, a very extensive one, and giving it away is a serious matter."

She made a slight gesture of impatience.

"I quite understand. My one desire is that it shall be my sister's to do exactly what she likes with."

The solicitor bowed and rang the bell for his clerk. It was not his place to warn this young lady further, although he considered that she was acting in an extremely imprudent manner.

After Marcia had affixed her signature, and the clerk had departed, she stood with the deed in her hand, apparently hesitating as to her next procedure.

The lawyer was struck by her appearance. She was very white, and there was a tense rigidity so to speak in her face, that seemed to say she had sored up her courage to some desperate point beyond which it was impossible to go.

"Will you take charge of this, and also of a letter?" she said at length, her voice low and unsteady, while she took from her pocket a sealed envelope, and handed it to him.

"Why, it is directed to your sister!" he exclaimed, in some surprise, glancing at the address, as he received it from her hand.

"Yes, and I shall be much obliged if you will give it to her first thing to-morrow morning!"

"But are you not going back to her yourself?"

A burning blush suffused Marcia's face.

"No, at least not just yet. I am going on a long journey, and—" She stopped and fumbled nervously with her handkerchief, while her twitching lips bore witness to her agitation. "There are reasons," she went on, falteringly, "why I don't want to wish her good-bye and those reasons are explained in the letter. Won't you do this for me?" she said, pleadingly, looking at him with her large, sorrowful eyes, in a way that almost brought the tears to his own.

"Certainly—certainly! I shall be glad to carry out your wishes, only it seemed a little

strange for you to ask me to deliver these documents to your sister, with whom I supposed you to be living."

The girl made no reply. There could be no question that she was very ill at ease, and as she went out of the office, gently repeating her thanks, Mr. Ferroll found himself looking after her with a distinctly uncomfortable feeling, as if some personal calamity threatened him.

"There is something strange about the girl—the sort of look in her eyes that I have only seen once, and that was on poor Rodney's face half an hour before he sent a bullet through his brain," he muttered to himself, as he pulled hard at his side whiskers. Then he went to the window, and looked out. Marcia's graceful figure was still in sight, walking along Bedford-row, but she was proceeding very slowly, as if she had an object in spinning out her walk.

The solicitor glanced at his watch. It was half-past six o'clock, and he could hear his clerk noisily putting away the books in the outer office, and thereby intimating that he strongly objected to being kept so much later than his usual time for departure.

Mr. Ferroll reached down his hat and gloves, and formed a sudden resolve. He would follow this girl, and see that she did not get into any mischief!

It was a most unprofessional thing to do, and in his heart the lawyer was inclined to ridicule his own fears. What business was it of his to meddle with other people's affairs—especially other people of whom he knew little or nothing?

But he was interested in these two sisters, so young, so beautiful, and apparently so lonely. That there was some mystery attaching to them he felt sure, but he was possessed by no vulgar curiosity to solve it. His sole motive was to guard Marcia from a danger which he instinctively felt beset her at this particular moment.

He put the deed of gift and her letter into the big iron safe, looked it, and then sallied forth into Bedford-row, walking quickly until he had gained upon the young girl whom he was following, and then slackening his pace to suit hers.

She did not even turn back, so there was little danger of her seeing him; though, even if she had done so, she would have attached no importance to the fact of his being behind her.

He noticed that she walked with a peculiar air of shrinking that seemed to say she desired to avoid attention, and she had also pulled down a thick black veil which she had raised while she was in the office.

At the end of Bedford-row she paused and addressed some hurried questions to a policeman who chanced to be standing near. After that she went on to the right, and having reached Oxford-circus, turned up Regent-street, where the lawyer almost lost her in the thronging crowds of people who were hurrying along the busy thoroughfare.

More than once he was inclined to turn back, telling himself he was wasting his time in a wild goose chase that would end in nothing but his own discomfiture.

All the same he kept on, though poor Marcia tried his patience sorely, for having come to the end of Regent-street she made for the Strand, and finally seated herself, wearily enough, on one of the recessed seats of Waterloo Bridge.

By this time it was eight o'clock—for she had walked very slowly—and dusk was falling. For half-an-hour she remained there motionless, looking neither to right nor left, then she rose, and kneeling on the seat, gazed over the parapet at the water below.

Very black and sullen it looked under the darkening sky as it flowed onward to the great hungry sea.

She sat down again, clasping her hands in her lap, and shuddering a little as if at some terrible thought that presented itself.

During this time the solicitor had wandered

up and down on the opposite side of the bridge, always keeping her in sight, and always on the alert for some action on her part that might give a clue to her intentions.

When she looked over the parapet he hurried impetuously forward, and as she resumed her former position he was standing close beside her, and their glances met.

She rose to her feet uttering a strange little cry.

"What brings you here?" she exclaimed, with a quick catching of the breath.

He hesitated. It was impossible to tell her the truth, and yet with those clear, searching eyes gazing straight up into his it was equally impossible to tell a lie.

"I was passing by and saw you leaning over the parapet, and I was afraid you might overbalance yourself," he replied, calmly.

She drew herself up with a half haughty gesture that made her look for the moment very much like Lettice.

"I am much obliged for your solicitude," she said, coldly; "but there is really no necessity for it. I am waiting here for a friend whom I have promised to meet, and after I have seen my friend, I shall go straight on to the station."

She dismissed him with a stiff bow, and Ferroll had no alternative but to raise his hat, and leave her, very much disconcerted at the result of his interference.

He was by no means satisfied as to her intentions even yet, for although she had spoken calmly enough, her speech had been said as if she had learned it by rote, in case of any emergency arising.

He knew she was watching him, so he walked off the bridge in the direction of the Strand, but arrived there, he turned back again, and swiftly retraced his steps.

There was a crowd on the bridge, all talking loudly, and gesticulating violently round the very spot where Marcia had sat. It was dark now, and the lamps were lighted, casting long, waving shadows on the blackness of the swiftly ebbing tide.

Ferroll forced his way through the surging throng of people until he was confronted by a policeman.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in an agitated voice, that surprised himself.

"Only a woman threw herself off the bridge," answered the helmeted functionary, stolidly indifferent to what was, after all, an everyday occurrence.

"When?" queried the solicitor, breathlessly.

"About five minutes ago."

Ferroll began stripping off his coat. He was an expert swimmer, and he would not see this young life cut off in its prime if he could by any possibility save her.

The policeman laid a heavy hand on his arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Make an effort to rescue the poor creature!" he returned, hotly.

"No use, sir! The water is ebbing, and long before this the body has been swept ever so far down stream. A boat has put out from the embankment, but I doubt whether it's any good. Anyhow, I ain't going to let you commit suicide too, so you may make your mind easy on that score. Do you know anything about this woman? This is the hat she was wearing; she threw it off just before she jumped."

He showed a small straw hat, trimmed with white ribbon, and having a black lace veil attached to it. Ferroll recognised them both immediately as those Marcia had worn.

"What a fool I was to leave her even for a moment!" he exclaimed, with vain regret. "I suspected from the first what her purpose was."

After all, he could not with any justice reproach himself, for he had tried his best on behalf of the unhappy girl, and it was not his fault that he had not succeeded.

A minute's reflection convinced him that the policeman was right in restraining him

from an attempted rescue. The night was unusually dark for the time of year, and that, added to the fact that the water was running out very hard, rendered the chance of saving the wretched woman a well-nigh hopeless one.

Events proved this to be the case, for in a little while, the man who had put out in a boat directly after witnessing the fatal leap from the bridge, returned, without having caught so much as another glimpse of the body, and Ferroll took his way back to Brunswick-square, to break the terrible news to Lettice.

Poor Maria! poor young life that had had its one brief hour of sunshine, and then quenched itself for ever in the deep dark waters of the cruel river!

She had sinned, but surely her suffering expiated her sin. Heaven's mercy is great, and who shall say that it was not extended to her in her moment of darkest, direst need?

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWS FOR LADY ALICIA.

It is a month later, a glorious day of early autumn, when nature is at her fairest. The woods round Aldham Mount are touched with ruddy gold and crimson, the blackberries hang ripe and luscious on the brambles, the briony clings out its clusters of vivid spurs in the hedges, and down in the orchards the damsons are showing their beautiful bloomy fruit, side by side with rosy cheeked apples.

At the best of times Lady Alicia Aldham is a chilly little creature, and even on this sunshiny afternoon there is a fire lighted in her boudoir, and she sits beside it holding up a fan to screen her face, but for the rest, basking luxuriously in its generous warmth.

No such thing as work is ever seen in Lady Alicia's hands; she is essentially indolent, and even a book is too much trouble for her to read. She takes her literature in such minute doses as the magazines provide, and if it is small in quantity it is also, as a rule, light in quality, too!

On this particular afternoon she is thinking deeply, and, so judge from the upright crease on her fair white forehead, her thoughts are not especially pleasant.

A good many things have happened lately that Lady Alicia had not bargained for, and she is of opinion that Providence is not taking so much trouble on her behalf as it ought to take!

"Come in!" she called out, in answer to a tap at the door, and there entered no less a person than Sir Wilfred Aldham; but Sir Wilfred looking as if ten years had been suddenly taken off his age.

It is true, his close-cut curls were still iron grey, but this rather added to than detracted from his appearance, while his upright carriage, his bright dark eyes, and pale, clear complexion, might have done credit to a man of five-and-twenty.

"Oh, it is you!" said Lady Alicia, and there was a distinct accent of disappointment in her voice.

"Yes, it is I. Whom else did you expect?" asked the Baronet, good humouredly, as he seated himself opposite to her.

"I don't know. Reginald, perhaps."

"Reginald has gone out shooting, hours ago!"

"And how is it you are not with him?" queried my lady, a little sharply.

"I started with him this morning, but I came back in time to take Violet for a drive." The crease in Lady Alicia's forehead grew deeper.

"I should have imagined that was Reginald's duty rather than yours," she replied, coldly.

Sir Wilfred's face flashed, and for a moment he seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"I drive more carefully than Reginald does," he answered, at length. "He is rather

apt to forget there are people in the world who don't care to risk having their necks broken every time they find themselves behind a horse!"

"Then Violet should teach him caution! Surely, as she is going to spend her life with him, it is time he made an effort to accommodate his tastes to hers!"

"I doubt whether the effort would ever be successful," returned the Baronet, gravely.

Lady Alicia flashed a quick glance at him.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Tut. That Reginald is utterly unsuited to be Violet's husband!"

My Lady's breath came rather quickly.

"It is late in the day to make such a discovery as that," she observed.

"I acknowledge it, but better late than never, and in this special instance, it is not by any means too late. I am glad you have broached the subject, Alicia. For some time I have wished to take you into my confidence, but Violet has begged me not to do so. Naturally enough, poor child, seeing that the position is awkward for her!"

"I don't understand," exclaimed my lady, sharply, while the fan fell from her hands, and she half turned, in order to fully face Sir Wilfred. "Either I am dense of comprehension this morning, or you explain yourself unusually badly. Anyway, I fail to see what confidence there can be between Violet and you, that all the world may not share."

And yet even as she spoke, her heart was sinking with a dread fear, that the radiant light in Sir Wilfred's eyes only intensified. Was it possible that her old suspicions had been true?

He drew his chair a little nearer, and took one of her hands in his. It could not be said that he was really fond of Lady Alicia, but he had always tried to do his duty to his dead brother's widow.

"I am afraid I shall surprise you, Alicia; perhaps, at first, displease you, by the communication I am about to make, but at the same time I am sure you will rejoice in my happiness."

"Your happiness!" she exclaimed, snatching her hand from him, and interrupting him without ceremony. "What has all this to do with your happiness?"

"I will tell you, if you will allow me. The fact is, Violet never cared for Reginald, and only became engaged to him at my wish, and now she has decided to break off the engagement with him finally."

"Then I consider her conduct most disgraceful!" cried Lady Alicia, hotly. "I never heard of such a thing! Break off her engagement, when, if it had not been for her illness, she would have been married to him weeks ago! It is abominable behaviour. What will people say, I wonder?"

"What they like, I suppose! I'm sure neither she nor I will care. It is only on Reginald's account that I am distressed; and, after all, I don't think he will mind it much, for he has never been a particularly ardent lover."

"All the same, he won't thank Violet for making him a laughing-stock before everybody. Reginald is extremely sensitive to ridicule."

Sir Wilfred's brows contracted slightly.

"I am aware of it, and it is partly for that reason I have been anxious to consult you as to the best means of making the announcement public. Of course we want to spare him as much as possible."

"We—we!" she repeated, impatiently.

"Why do you speak of 'we' in that absurd manner?"

"Because I hope to make Violet my wife!"

Lady Alicia burst into a peal of laughter; but there was very little mirth in it. After all, the revelation hardly came upon her as a surprise, though she would not confess this even to herself.

"Upon my word, Violet has had two strings to her bow, and played them off one against the other very successfully!" she ex-

claimed, with an insolence that she made no effort to conceal. "Since when, may I ask, has she contracted this second engagement?"

Sir Wilfred rose from his chair with grave displeasure. It seemed to him that for the first time he was discovering his sister-in-law's real character; and indeed, up to the present, Lady Alicia had been diplomatic enough to show her most favourable side to him, and keep her arrogance for other people who were not in a position to resent it.

"If you take that tone, Alicia, you render further conversation between us an impossibility," he answered, sternly, and his manner partly brought Lady Alicia to her senses.

"I beg your pardon. I had no intention to offend you; but, really, the idea of Violet betrothed to uncle and nephew at the same time was enough to take one off one's guard, as you must confess."

"You are mis-stating the case. Violet is not engaged to me; but she loves me, and for that reason she is determined, and I am determined that her engagement with Reginald shall be broken off at once. You will remember that she is only just recovering from an illness that threatened her life, and now, now, she has had no opportunity of speaking to him on the subject. Indeed, I have forbidden her to do so, for fear of the excitement causing her a relapse. Nevertheless, she feels her false position acutely, and is most anxious to come to an understanding with him. It struck me that it might be better, if he were prepared beforehand for what she was going to say to him, and it was for that reason I sought you this afternoon. I fancied, too, you might help Violet very much if you were present at the interview."

"I!" she repeated, with a disdainful curl of her lip. "I am very much flattered that you should have selected me for such a distinguished position; but I really fail to see what good I can do."

"So do I now," answered the Baronet, shortly. "I am sorry I have troubled you thus far, but I was under the impression that I should find in you a sympathising friend."

He turned as if to depart, but she called him back.

"Wait a minute, if you please. I wish to fully understand the position. What are you going to do in the matter?"

"See Reginald myself directly after dinner, and explain everything to him. I wished to do so before, only Violet was nervously anxious to do it herself."

"And then?"

"Then," he resumed, steadily, "Violet and I will be married very quietly in a month's time, and I shall take her to the south of France for the winter."

"Will not such haste look slightly indecent? Society will say she might at least have been quite off the old love, before she was on with the new."

"Society may say exactly what it likes. Thank Heaven, I am independent of it."

Saying which he left her, while his sister-in-law sprang to her feet, and began pacing up and down in a passion of mad fury, that she had had hard work to disguise while he was in the room.

"The fool, the stupid, idiotic, fool!" she exclaimed, half aloud, "to come to me for sympathy—me who will be turned out of this house to make room for a new mistress. Rejoice in his happiness, indeed! I would have rejoiced ten thousand times more, if I had seen them both lying dead before me. What is to become of me with my small income, and those two children, when Violet is Lady Aldham, I wonder? Lodgings at the seaside, I suppose, or some small cottage in Bayswater, where I haven't space to turn myself round. A nice prospect, forsooth!"

Her boudoir looked out upon the terrace, and at this moment, she caught the sound of wheels crunching the gravel below. A visitor, no doubt.

She peered cautiously from behind the curtains, deciding that she would tell her maid



["WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?" MARCHIA EXCLAIMED, WITH A QUICK CATCHING OF HER DEPTH.]

to say she was out, for she felt little inclined to play the part of amiable hostess; but on seeing who the visitor was, she altered her programme. Hubert Ellesmere was much too welcome a guest to be sent away, even at such a moment as this.

Quick as thought, Lady Alicia whisked into the adjoining dressing-room, smoothed her hair, applied a liberal allowance of powder to her heated face, and drank a little sal volatile by way of soothing her excited nerves. So effectual were these remedies, that when she returned to greet Hubert, she was the same coquettish smiling little woman, who had almost turned his head with her pretty ways two seasons ago.

She had seen a good deal of him lately, for poor Hubert was glad to get companionship, while he was staying at the lonely old Grange, and Lady Alicia would allow him to talk of Lettice to his heart's content.

No one knew what the frivolous little creature suffered while he dilated on the beauty, the sweetness, the girlish innocence of the woman he had loved, and—as it seemed—lost.

Many a time her delicate nails pierced deep into the pink flesh as she clenched her hands during Hubert's rhapsodies, but the look of sympathetic interest never left her face, and often the tears swam in her china-blue eyes as she encouraged him to hope that in time Lettice might be found.

"It is absurd to suppose she can be hidden away for ever," she would declare. "You say you are sure she is not keeping from you of her own free will, therefore you may be equally sure that she will return ere very long."

"Keeping away from me of her own free will!" Hubert repeated, indignantly. "The idea is absurd. Why should she keep away from me?"

Lady Alicia shook her head.

"I cannot tell. You see, I know so little about her. She was a very reticent girl who

never spoke of her past life, and it is possible——" Here she came to a pause, as if confused, and played nervously with her rings.

"What is possible?" asked Hubert.

"I was going to say that she might have had a lover before she came to Aldham Mount."

"Never! I would stake my life on her faith."

"My dear boy, you take me too seriously. All pretty girls have admirers, and I am willing to acknowledge that Miss Rufford was a very pretty girl indeed. I do not mean to say that she was engaged or anything of that sort, but the probabilities are certainly in favour of her having had a sweetheart long before you ever saw her."

"And even if she had, what has that to do with her disappearance?"

"Nothing, probably. And yet I have heard that all things are fair in love or war."

Beyond this Lady Alicia would not go, but she had skillfully sowed her seed of mistrust, and she waited and watched patiently for it to ripen and bear fruit.

For the last week Hubert had been absent in London prosecuting his inquiries concerning Lettice, and naturally enough my lady was anxious to know if these inquiries had had any results.

She waited in the boudoir for ten minutes, wondering how it was he had not come upstairs—as was his wont. Then, growing impatient, she rang the bell, which was answered by a footman.

"Was not that a visitor?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady. Mr. Ellesmere."

"Why was he not brought up here?"

"Because he wanted to see Sir Wilfred, my lady."

"Sir Wilfred!" repeated Lady Alicia, in a voice that hardly rose above a whisper, while her face grew deadly pale.

"Yes, my lady; and it happened that Sir Wilfred had just gone out, so Mr. Ellesmere

said he would wait until he came back, and he is in the library now."

"Very well. That will do."

The man bowed and left the room, wondering what there was in his very simple communication to send every vestige of colour from his mistress's face.

That Lady Alicia was much disturbed there could be no doubt. She waited for a few minutes after he had gone, then went swiftly downstairs and into the library, where Hubert was standing thoughtfully looking out of the window.

When he turned round she caught her breath sharply. There was a curious expression in his face whose meaning she could not quite fathom.

"Well!" she exclaimed, dispensing with the ceremony of a greeting. "You have had news of Lettice?"

"Yes."

"And you know where she is?"

"Yes," once more.

Lady Alicia's heart began to beat with a rapidity that was certainly unusual to it. She drew back so as to get the full benefit of the shadow of the curtains, while he remained in the light.

"Tell me what has happened!" she cried, quickly, clasping her two hands across her chest. "Don't you see how impatient I am, and you are keeping me on the tenter-hooks of suspense? Where is Miss Rufford?"

"In London."

"And you have seen her?"

"No. I have not seen her, but I have heard from her."

(To be continued.)

The Japanese language is said to contain sixty thousand words, every one of which requires a different symbol. It is impossible for one man to learn the whole, and a well-educated Japanese is familiar with only about ten thousand words.



[EDWARD DOES NOT SEEK TO TOUCH ALICE—HE DARES NOT EVEN LOOK AT HER—BUT RIVETS HIS GLANCE UPON THE GROUND!]

NOVELLETTE.

OUR ALICE.

CHAPTER I.

"With your exceptional chances, you ought to make something good of your life," says Alice, severely, bending serious brown eyes upon Edward. "You simply fritter it away."

Edward stretches his lazy length at her feet and laughs.

"I can assure you there is no fellow enjoys life more than I."

"Not enjoyment and not sorrow," begins Alice, but again Edward interrupts her with a light laugh, and a careless gesture.

"Not that quotation if you please; it is too hackneyed. I acknowledge the whole poem is instinct with good advice; but I have heard it so often it has lost all effect. Then, too, I am not more partial to good advice than other ordinary mortals."

But Alice is in her most judicial mood, and is not to be turned from her subject.

"If I were a man," she says, quite gravely, "I would not be content with mediocrity, or worse."

Edward lifts himself a little on his elbow. "Granted you could change your sex, what distinction would you aim at?"

"Why, if I were called to the bar, I would never rest until I was made a judge. If a soldier, nothing but a generalship would content me. If in the church, I would be Archbishop of Canterbury at the close!"

"The robes would be immensely becoming to you," Edward says, with utmost levity, "and there isn't the slightest doubt that you would conscientiously do your duty. And now, my dear monitor, let me assure you that when you accuse me of indolence, you are labouring under a great and cruel delusion. There isn't a more active fellow under the sun

than I; cricket, football, polo, rowing, hunting, each in their season claims my most sincere attention."

"Sports! Yes!" retorts my sister, contemptuously.

"But not to be despised; and you know 'all work and no play.'"

"Not that quotation, if you please," she breaks in, with perfect mimicry of his tone and manner, "it is too hackneyed."

He turns to me.

"Isn't she always down on a fellow, Nina? I wonder how she would like it, if I went in for lawn tennis and district visiting?"

"I should despise you just a little more than I do now," answers Alice, her lips curving into the faintest smile. "I hate effeminate men. Oh, dear! where is the use of talking to you? You are utterly incorrigible, and all my lecturing is wasted upon you!"

"What a wiggling you are giving me," ruefully. "See here, Alice; be a nice reasonable girl, and listen to me. There isn't the slightest occasion for me to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and the governor positively won't have me at the bank. He says I have no business aptitude, and prefers I should be a gentleman at leisure."

"You might go into parliament," suggests Alice, oblivious of his age, which is scarcely twenty-four.

"And become premier," cries Edward, with a about of laughter, "thanks, I am no politician. I am not a good diplomatist; and now my dear girl, don't worry yourself and me over impossibilities any longer. Your lecture and the heat have reduced me to such a state of exhaustion, that I shall find it impossible to reach home unless you give me some refreshment. Suppose we have tea here; it is awfully pleasant, and with all your vices you are not inhospitable."

"With all your virtues you are curiously impudent!" retorts Alice, smiling despite herself. "Nina, will you ask Jenny to bring up all the things. Mother and father are gone

away to Dover, and have taken the two youngsters with them. You have no objection to Elsie sharing the meal? She will be lonely in the house!"

"Let her come by all means. She is my special champion and admirer. Now if you two girls esteemed me just as highly—"

"You would be as vain as a peacock," laughs Alice, "and really even now, you have been so flattered and fêted all your life, that you are dreadfully conceited. Ask Nina if it isn't so, she is not prejudiced."

"You are not altogether insufferable," I say, as I walk away, "but there is great, very, very great room for improvement."

"*Et tu Brute!* Nina hurry up with the tea, or I shall swoon!" and sighing ponderously, he resumes his old position at Alice's feet, whilst I run off to help Jenny in her arrangements.

In a very little while we have spread a cloth upon the grass in our own pleasant orchard, and whilst I cut piles of bread and butter (we all have healthy appetites), Alice prepares the cucumber, crisp lettuces, and radishes; garnishing all the dishes with cool vine-leaves, until Edward declares, that he never saw a more inviting spread, and that our tea and cream alike are above par.

Elsie, our youngest sister, is bubbling over with merriment, and as Edward supplements her nonsense, shouts of laughter echo through the green alleys; and even Alice forgets to lecture our guest on his indolence and lack of purpose.

I should like you to see our Alice as she is now. She is wearing a pale pink cotton frock, with plenty of white lace about it, made by her own pretty fingers; and though she is twenty, there is all the soft bloom on cheek and throat, all the dewiness in her great brown eyes, which seems to belong by right and tradition to sweet sixteen.

The masses of bright, brown hair, which refuse to be orderly, curl in little tendrils about the broad, white brow and dainty

cheeks, being gathered into a great knot at the nose of the creamy neck.

I don't say her features are regular—I hate regularity—but they are bewitching, and have a charm all their own. Her smile is a revelation. She is just a wee bit above the medium height, slight, and graceful, and in all the county I think there is no girl who (to borrow a phrase of Edward's) "can hold a candle" to our Alice.

She is the oldest of us all: I come next being eighteen, then follow Elsie, Bertie, and Henry, aged respectively fourteen, twelve, and ten.

We are not rich people, by any means. I don't suppose father's income all told, exceeds four hundred per annum; but we are the oldest family in the county, and though commoners regard the mushroom nobility with suspicion of pity not unmixed with scorn. We are proud of our old name; and though we neither entertain largely nor frequently (our means not permitting), we are quite popular people; if you knew my parents, you would scarcely wonder it should be so.

There is father, handsome, and genial, with a hand to help all who need, and mother, stately, gracious, kindly, to say nothing of our Alice. And I think we are happier than most families, because, despite our gentle birth, all of us have work to do, our servants being limited to two maids, and an odd job man.

Father is a splendid gardener. Mother, in fact, calls him "The Original Adam;" she herself is head chef when we entertain, while Alice and I mend and make for ourselves and Elsie, whose destructive powers are terrible.

We have finished our tea, as I should have finished my digestion long ago; and Edward with a sigh of utter and pure content, resumes his old position at Alice's feet.

"I've been thinking," he begins, when Elsie interjects, impudently.

"Oh, poor old Edward; hasn't it made your head ache?"

He bursts into a loud laugh.

"Now, don't scold her, Alice. She knows how rare an occurrence it is, and pities me. Now, Elsie, you monkey, keep quiet a moment, or you shall not share sport. As I say, I have been thinking it would be awfully jolly if we rowed down to Lislebrooke to-morrow morning starting quite early. White will pack us up all we need, and go down to get things ready."

"Oh, don't have any servants about," breaks in Elsie. "It is better fun to help oneself."

"To hear is to obey, your majesty. We can return in time for dinner, and as this small piece of sovereignty is my governor's special favourite, she shall come too. We'll dine en famille, no fuss, no feathers—"

"No farblows, but plenty of fun," interrupts our dreadful junior. "Oh! Edward, you are nearly an angel!" and she proceeds to execute some queer gambols for our edification, until Alice threatens her with summary punishment. "If you got an outing so seldom as I, you would be excited," she says, as she tumbles in a heap upon the ground. "Oh, good gracious! how dreadful grown-up sisters are!"

"It is much more dreadful to be without them," Edward remarks, pulling one long strand of russet brown hair.

"If you think so, I'll make you a present of Alice. Nina has to obey me, not I her," laughs the incorrigible; "but mamma upholds Alice in everything, and so she's got great notions of her own importance."

"My child," remarks Alice, snavely, "you are allowing your feelings to run away with your reason. Go to the house, dear, and ask Jenny to put you to bed and give you a soothing draught."

With her cheeks flaming crimson, Elsie starts to her feet.

"You are a horrid old thing!" she cries, angrily; "and I won't speak another word to

you to-day!" and she stalks off triumphantly. But no one calls her back, and long before she reaches the house her dignity is growing "fuss by degrees and beautifully less;" but she does not return.

Shaking himself like a huge dog, Edward rises too.

"I must be going," he says, with a regretful glance into the depths of the cool orchard where patches of sunlight lie like gold on the long lush grass; "but I feel like Adam when he was turned out of Eden, I am leaving all the beauty and sweetness behind. Well, girls, I shall call for you at eleven, if you can be ready so early. Good-bye, and no lectures to-morrow, Alice. We are all going to be magnificently idle!"

A moment later he is swinging through the garden at a rapid pace, nor does he turn his head to look back at us; but Alice watches him to the last, and sighs a little as his stalwart figure disappears from view.

"What are you thinking?" I ask. "You are as grave as a judge!"

"Of what a splendid thing he might make of his life if he would. It is a shame that he should let his talents rust for want of use. In time I think I shall grow to despise him!"

"Hardly," I answer; "and when there is need for action he will not be found wanting; there is no cessation for him to labour. Now let us go in. Our party will be returning soon," and without further speech we follow in Elsie's steps; but I know all the while Alice is thinking of the vast possibilities in Edward's life, which he does not yet realise.

She has great notions about one's duty towards the world at large (though I am sure I don't know how and where she gleaned them), and she is inclined to be just a little hard on Edward that he does not share them.

He has been our friend from his boyhood, almost our brother, and not all his wealthy acquaintances can lure him from us. Sometimes I think he must be more than a friend to our Alice if she would allow it; and I am quite sure, rich as Mr. Carstairs is, he would never object to such an alliance, because by birth we are his superiors.

He is the banker of Ivydell, and in the confidence of all his clients. There are fabulous stories told of his wealth, and many of his generosity. His name is always first and foremost in any charitable subscription, and I think there is scarcely a person in the county who does not speak well of him.

Though he is a widower, he practises greatest hospitality (his sister keeps house for him), and it is our highest pleasure to dine en famille there.

I think I can see him now; the courtly, smiling gentleman, olive complexioned, with the ruddy hue of health on his cheeks; his sparkling black eyes, and the grizzled moustache.

He is going bald, and it is Elsie's delight to watch the flies wander over that shining patch (which she calls the desert of Sahara), and our anxiety lest she shall comment upon it in her usual outspoken fashion.

Even now, though years have gone, I can hear the echo of his mellow, pleasant voice, which seemed to have so true a ring, and sigh to think of all that followed. Of a day of disgrace and flight, when we learned our old friend was other than he seemed, and we had all been cruelly deceived.

But not a thought of trouble comes to disturb us to-night. We go to rest early, sleeping lightly as children, and rising with gay hearts.

Alice superintends Elsie's toilet, a necessary precaution, as the child is almost too excited to know whether she is wearing her frock right or wrong side, and certainly would not give the least heed to the state of her long, waving, russet hair.

The child looks very nice, despite her queer, irregular features, and saucy, tip-tilted nose. Bertie has irreverently christened her the "vegetable girl," because he says she has a turn-up (turnip) nose, and carrotty looks; but

although he reminds her of these usually unpleasant facts, she is in such high good humour that she merely laughs, saying, "personalities are excessively bad form!"

At eleven precisely Edward calls for us. We have all been ready quite an hour; and mother having begged us to be "very, very careful, and to keep Elsie out of danger," we start on our picnic.

I think none of us will ever forget the happy summer day, because of what so soon followed it. We are like children let loose for a holiday, and Alice is the maddest and merriest of us all.

I like to picture Edward as he walked or sat beside her that day; because I think, though great joy came to him after long pain, his face never quite wore so glad a look again.

We tell stories, sing songs, gather more wild flowers than we can carry home, and all of us do justice to the good things White had packed for us.

And then when we are all too weary for much speech, Edward rows us back through the dim, delicious light, under the fragrant limes overhanging the river, and as we reach shore again, he says—

"It has been a divine day!"

"I wish it could last for ever," Alice answers, dreamily, and does not see the sudden flush of pleasure on his handsome face.

Elsie is most weary of us all, so to her he devotes himself during the brief walk to Rantrew House, and there a maid takes charge of us, conveying us to a handsome room, where we set to work to repair the ravages in our toilets.

CHAPTER II.

It is wonderful how refreshed we feel when we have bathed our faces, brushed our roughened looks and shaken the dust from our dresses.

Elsie brightens up wonderfully, and leads the way, briskly, to the dining-room. Neither Mr. Carstairs nor his sister have dressed, for which I am thankful, as our gowns are more or less crumpled, and Elsie's is decidedly dirty. But with sublime disregard of this she goes straight to our host's side.

"Oh," she says, "we have had a lovely day! I wish you had been with us."

"I wish I had," he answers, pinching her ear; "if only to please you, Elsie. Gracious! what a tall girl you are getting. Stand back, and let me look at you. You are nearly as tall as Alice. In a little while you'll be wearing long frocks and voting me a slow old fellow."

"Indeed I shall not!" she retorts with emphasis. "Girls look so stupid sailing round with trains like peacocks. I should always be treading on mine if I wore one; and just think, I couldn't jump a brook or climb a tree!"

"But you'll have to come to it," he says, laughing, "and after a bit you won't mind it; but I shall miss my saucy Elsie."

"That you never shall. Way, I love you nearly as well as my dad," and she gives emphasis to her words by a hearty kiss. "Now, let me sit beside you, please. May I, Miss Carstairs?"

The lady smiles assent, but it seems to me she is looking pale and worn; that her manner is anxious and nervous.

She talks very little throughout the sumptuous meal, and when, later on, Alice plays for us, and Edward sings, she lies back with closed lids and set lips upon a couch, never speaking save when addressed.

Elsie, perched on Mr. Carstairs' knees, is giving him a valuable account of our day's doings; and he promises, smilingly, to accompany us on our next jaunt, and this elicits a perfect storm of thanks from her.

It is late when we prepare to leave, and Edward gets ready to escort us. The night is so divine, we prefer to walk home. Mr. Carstairs goes with us to the door.

"Good-bye," says Elsie, clinging to him. "I wish you knew how much I love you. You are the nicest and best man in the world except my dad!"

And is it fancy, or does a shadow really steal over the handsome face as he kisses my little sister, and unlocks her arms from about his neck, saying, in a voice that has a queer sound,—

"May you always keep your good opinion of me, child. Good-night, and Heaven bless you!"

The homeward walk is silent. Edward has drawn Alice's head within his arm, and his face, as it is bent towards her, is more earnest than I have ever yet seen it. When we have nearly reached the house, he says, suddenly,—

"Alice, will you like to know that your words of yesterday have dwelt persistently with me, although, to confess the truth, I tried at first not to remember them. I do not think I shall easily forget them."

"I am glad," she answers, softly. "You could do so much, if you would."

"And if I act upon them; if I find work and cleave to it, what then?" he demands.

"I do not—understand," she falters, whilst Elsie begins to signal to me, only I promptly suppress her.

"Let me make it plainer?"

"Not to-night, Edward. I am very tired; another time I will hear you," and so she slips away from him, and into the porch like the will-o'-the-wisp she is.

"Good-night," he says to me, in a crest-fallen tone. "Is Alice angry?"

And that dreadful child, Elsie, laughs.

"No; but you are such a goose. You let her do just as she likes. If you were to scold her—oh well, Nina, you needn't frown—I shall tell Edward what I think the first time we are alone. I hate half-hearted friends," and vexed as I am with her, I cannot help joining Edward's laughter, as, like a bird, she flies into the house, and is lost to view.

The next few days pass uneventfully enough, only Alice carefully avoids all the little interviews with Edward, and does not seem disposed to speak of him to me.

Then, Jenny, our housemaid falls ill, and has to return home; and so many extra duties fall to our share that we have really small time to entertain even familiar friends. Mother comes to us one morning, looking worried and anxious.

"Girls," she says, "I have here a telegram from the Marstons, saying that they are passing through Ivydell en route for Brighton, and as they must stay two or three hours, will be glad if they can rest and lunch here. I don't like to be inhospitable, but, really, with Jane away, it is extremely awkward."

"We can help," says Alice, promptly. "Let Sarah get the rooms in order, and whilst you make some of your nice dishes, we can shell peas, and," this with a rueful glance at her white, small fingers, "scrape potatoes, and do heaps of other things beside."

"If you will, dears—"

"Of course we will. Never let it be breathed that the Musgraves were lacking in good old English hospitality. Come, Nina!"

A few moments later we are seated in the orchard, whither our stout cook has carried a great hamper of newly-gathered peas, and, as we work, we laugh and chatter as girls will, until Edward's voice startles, and for a moment silences us.

"What are you doing?" he asks. "Playing at being busy?"

"No, sir; we are working in real earnest. Will you help?"

"If only to save myself a lecture, yes," and coming forward he begins to assist in such a clumsy fashion, that we both laugh outright.

"If that is how you reward my well-meant efforts," he says, "I shall go on strike."

"Just your style," draws Alice. "If you were a mechanic, I suppose you would try for eight hours' work daily, and double pay. Then you'd live on the Trade's Union, and be content to idle about whilst your wife and

family, provided you had them, lived on half rations."

He flashes darkly, believing her to be in earnest, when, indeed, she is only jesting.

"Perhaps I should go farther than that," he says.

"You mean," laughing, "you would strike for higher wages, and all the work put on!"

"I am a useless fellow, I know," he answers, in a low, hard voice, "but I don't quite deserve that you should think so badly of me. I know you hold me as contemptible and worthless; but—"

"Edward! I never meant that," she cries, and puts out her hand to him, but he will neither take nor touch it.

"Alice," he says, in that same low constrained voice, "there must be some understanding between us. I will not go on thus; I love you, with all my life I love you. What is my doom?"

I turn to fly, but Alice holds me fast.

"You must stay," she says, almost fiercely. "I will not be alone. Edward, why did you speak?"

"Because I have been too long silent; because your scorn is too hard to bear, tell me what to do, and I will do it. Give me some hope of winning you; and then let what may come, I do not care. Alice, my darling, will you be my wife? Will you not say you care for me a little now?"

She trembles and blushes, then suddenly lifting her frank, beautiful eyes to his, answers,—

"I do love you, Edward, I think I have always loved you; but until I can respect you, I will not bind myself to you. When you have taught me to look up to you—if you still wish it—I will marry you; but never until then."

"And I," he says, in equally tense tones, "will never breathe another word of love to you, until I have made you acknowledge I am not altogether unworthy a woman's regard. If you would give yourself to me now, I should work with double ardour; but I do not ask such a boon. I suppose, with a little touch of irony, you don't care what work it is, so long as it is work."

"No," she answers, gravely, "the meanest and most poorly paid labour is dignified when the whole heart is thrown into it; and I am not afraid you will disappoint me."

"Thank you, for so much faith in my promise. I hardly hoped you would trust me so far," he says, bitterly.

She lays her little slender hand upon his arm.

"When you go," she murmurs, "do not let it be in anger, life is all too short for us to quarrel. We are friends, dear?"

"Friends! yes, Alice, whatever comes. However poorly I may merit your confidence, however cruelly you may treat me, I shall love you still. In just that one thing, neither chance nor change can alter me. When I have thought out a way in which to win your regard, I will see you again; until then, good-bye," and without further speech, he goes crashing through the fallen twigs and brambles, leaving Alice very white and quiet.

"Oh, Alice," I say, "don't you think you are just a trifle too hard upon him. He loves you so dearly, and really there is small necessity for him to occupy himself with any pursuit."

"Do you think I want my husband to sink to the level of a hunting, hard-drinking squire; don't you know how true it is that indolence breeds vice. Perhaps you don't quite understand my feeling, Nina dear—I think I am like Enid in Tennyson's beautiful poem, who lamented above her sleeping lord that she was no true wife, because she did not invite him to high and mighty deeds; because she did not waken him from the slumber of love into which he had fallen. Like her, 'I cannot love my lord and not his name.' And now, dear Nina, out of pity for my pains say no more, and I would tell nothing of our compact to father or mother. Let it lie

between us, until Edward has proved himself. Come, our work is getting on very slowly."

As may be supposed, conversation flagged between us through the remainder of the morning. Each was busy with her own thoughts, as she shelled peas or went about little household duties; and save that Alice was paler and graver than usual, there was little change in her.

Mother attributed the pallor to the excessive heat, and no one guessed at the hidden cause. When the Marstons arrived, she was her own gay and gracious self; and I saw that the admiration young Marston had always shown for her, was not in the least cooled by six months' absence.

Indeed, I know his openly expressed preference for her society troubled Alice not a little, neither did it please Mrs. Marston, because, with her son's wealth, she thought he might well look higher than a simple and penniless gentlewoman.

It was rather a relief to us all, I think, when they took their leave. Father gives a sigh of intense content, as he watches Mrs. Marston disappearing through the garden.

"Goodness!" he says, with a comical glance at Alice, "that woman's tongue forces me to believe in perpetual motion. But her son is a very decent sort of fellow, eh, Alice?"

"I really was not so interested in him to study his merits, father," she answers, languidly; and that terrible Elsie breaks in.

"Oh, I guess Alice was cross about something, for she was quite rude to Cyril Marston."

"Rude!" says father, with a fine assumption of dismay, "really, Elsie, you are not going to assert a Musgrave would treat a guest with discourtesy?"

"Yes, I am, Cyril Marston asked Alice for a rose, and she told him to gather one. I ought to know, I was hidden behind the laurels and heard it all."

"Eavesdropping! oh, Elsie! and pray what did Cyril say?"

"He said, no, he should only value one her fair fingers had gathered."

"Father, this is too bad," broke out Alice, indignantly, with the blood flaming into her cheeks and her eyes flashing fire.

"Go on, Elsie, you are very amusing," father remarks, coolly, and the child only too delighted with his permission, continues,—

"He said he would treasure it, as a miser treasures gold; and then Alice answered with her high and mighty air,—

"'You are a plagiarist, Mr. Marston!' and he looked as silly as a goose, as he said,—

"'I don't care what I am if only you will think kindly of me. Won't you try to, Miss Alice?'"

"This is getting serious, Alice!" but she has left the room in hot anger.

"That's just the way she acted this afternoon," says Elsie. "She lifted up her head like this, and walked away, leaving Cyril sighing like a pair of bellows."

"Father, it is too bad to encourage the child in her naughtiness," I begin, trying to smother all sound of laughter in my voice, "and you had better go to bed, Elsie."

"Not before mother comes home; I must wish her good-night. I am not to go, am I, dad? I am such company for you!"

"You may stay, monkey!" as she perches herself on his knee, "but you must be extremely good; and, another time, Elsie, don't go eavesdropping; it isn't honourable."

"But it's fun, and you didn't think to tell me that, dad, till you had heard all I had to say; and it's no use trying to frown whilst your eyes are laughing all the while!"

"Do you know what sometimes happens to precocious children?"

"Yes; they come before the public as infant prodigies, and get heaps of money, and plenty of fuss made over them; and everything they say is put into the papers. It must be horrid—and generally the 'prodigies'

aren't nice at all; please don't insult me papa, by calling me ill names."

"Look here, Nina, I must turn this child over to your mother; or perhaps it would be as well to send her to a select boarding school."

"I should run away; oh! you darling old dad, you could not do without your Elsie!" and she nestles so lovingly against him, with such softness upon her face and in her eyes, that father answers, gently,—

"No, Elsie darling. I could not let my sunbeam go out of the house. Nina, go and look for your sister."

So I leave them together, and going towards the orchard, catch a glimpse of Alice's white gown as she leans over the low paling which skirts the road. She is talking earnestly to someone, I cannot tell who that someone is until a voice says,—

"Is that you, Nina? Come here, and help me to reason with this most obdurate girl."

"It is you, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Yes, it is I; and I want you to use your eloquence in my boy's behalf; come here and listen to 'the tale I will unfold.' There that is just a nice position—now hear me!"

Oh! what an eventful day this is. I am getting quite bewildered.

CHAPTER III.

"I THINK I need not say there is no young lady of my acquaintance I would so wish to see Edward's wife, as this very obdurate sister of yours. It is hard she should blame him for what is utterly and entirely my fault. I wanted to make a gentleman of him; she frowns upon him because he is what I intended him to be—a man of leisure, and before she will listen to him all this is to be altered. You know what that means for him, Nina—a long separation, and, seeing she is beautiful, there are others who may wish to win her from him, and one may succeed."

"No," says Alice impetuously, "no, Mr. Carstairs."

"You are young and just now regard inconstancy as a crime; but my dear, you are not bound to Edward by any vow—you are free to please yourself, and then, of what avail is his labour? What I propose Nina is this. Our young lovers shall be married at once, and spend their honeymoon abroad. Then, on their return, Edward shall devote himself to any pursuit he may choose, and Alice shall be his helpmate. That is fair, is it not, Nina?"

"I think so."

"It sounds so, but in reality it is not! What a man will hesitate to do before marriage, rest assured he will utterly refuse to perform after," says Alice, gravely. "Mr. Carstairs, for Edward's sake let him have his own will, let him go out into the working world—one day I believe you will thank me for my 'obstinacy' as you are pleased to call it. For the rest," and here she blushes beautifully, "I love him, and I shall be true to him. When he returns he will find me waiting for him—a Musgrave disdains inconstancy!"

"But dear," he urges with an eagerness which surprises me now, but which later on I shall understand, "does not your conditions imply a doubt of Edward's truth?"

"No," gravely; "only Mr. Carstairs, it is not for a day or a week one takes one's marriage vows, but for all the long years of life; and surely it behoves one to look well before one takes a leap into the darkness. You say Edward wishes to go from here at once. Do not, I pray you step before him, and make his life for ever incomplete—remember a life without a purpose can only be wretched."

"Nina, have you nothing to say; won't you beg your sister to make her happiness and Edward's now? I will provide generously for them, it is hard I should lose my only son."

"Not a word, Nina," cries Alice in greatest agitation. "I will not hear you! Don't you

know how all the while my heart is crying out to reverse my decision; if you love me, you will not steal my courage from me. Listen, it is an honourable, a noble profession Edward will adopt—at Cambridge he studied medicine, in London he will pursue the study, and finally adopt the profession. Dear Mr. Carstairs, I thank you for your generosity, and the warm welcome waiting me at your home, but I cannot submit my will to yours in this instance."

"I think," he says, slowly, "you will one day regret your answer. I hope not—I am disappointed—but I would not speak of that—it is of Edward and of you I think;" and under the clear moonlight his face shows strangely pale and drawn. "It is natural I should covet happiness for my boy. This is your final answer; there is no appeal from it?"

"None; I, too, desire happiness for him, even at the cost of my own. You will forgive me and try to think I am acting for the best."

"There is nothing to forgive, child;" and then, having kissed us, he goes slowly and thoughtfully down the road. With a little sigh Alice turns to me,—

"It has been a tiring day, let us go in dear;" and something in her manner compels my silence.

Two days later Edward comes again.

"I am leaving here to-night," he says to Alice. "I hoped you would give me one hour before I go; I shall not return until Christmas. Will you write me?"

"If you wish it, yes," she answers, whilst the colour comes and goes in her fair face, and little lights and shadows flicker in the depths of her lovely eyes.

She is proud to feel he will do so much for her sake; but, for all that, I know her heart is heavy with the sense of the parting now so near.

She goes out with him into the orchard, and I am careful to keep the children from intruding upon them. It is not one hour she gives him, but three; and when she returns she returns alone.

She is pale and has been crying; but there is a sort of glory on her face, and a light in her eyes I have never seen there before.

"I am proud of my lover," she says, ever so softly, as I take her hand. "Oh, yes! I am proud of him!" and then she goes to her own room, and no one molests her, for her secret is hers no longer. Mr. Carstairs having unburdened himself of the story to father, who highly approves Alice's conduct,

"Riches take wings to themselves," he says, gravely. "A man's trade or profession can never be stolen from him. The child is right!"

Elsie is fiercely indignant. Edward has always been her property. Why should he go away just to please Alice? She will ask him to stay; he has never refused her anything, he will not do so now.

And so at the expected time of his departure the poor child rushes down to the roadside; but she is only in time to see him whirl by, and he is all unconscious of the little waiting figure by the gate.

In a paroxysm of anguish and despair she throws herself, face downwards, in the long lush grass under the fruit-laden trees, and sobs as though her very heart will break.

Often in those days, not quite understanding her, we were angry with her. Oh! if only we had guessed what the future held we should have watched every varying mood of hers, and tried to share in it! Now I speak sharply to her.

"For shame, Elsie!" I say. "You are behaving like a baby; and Edward knows best what is good for himself and Alice."

She lifts herself on one elbow, and looks at me with wet, angry eyes.

"You are like all the rest!" she says, passionately, "you have a heart as big as a pin's point! You don't care a fig when your friends leave you, you are ready to put other people in the place; but I—I love Edward,

and he never said good-bye, he never even saw me!"

"He will come again soon," I answer, at a loss what to say. "Elsie don't be ridiculous. Why, you are making a perfect fright of yourself!"

"I don't care. If crying myself blind would bring my dear old Edward back I'd never cease crying. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how lost we shall be without him!"

I am bound to confess that at this point I grow genuinely angry, and walk away in high dudgeon, leaving Elsie free to go or stay as she pleases, for the present she elects to stay.

In the days that follow she is as quiet as Alice herself—a most rare and noteworthy thing in her. One day we miss her from the mid-day meal, but we are not alarmed. She is not to be judged by ordinary children, and there are times when she will wander away by herself for hours together. Not until dusk do we grow anxious, and then Mr. Carstairs himself comes to relieve our anxiety.

"You must not be angry," he says, shaking hands all round, "it is quite my fault your little maid has been absent so long. I found her on the road six miles away, and in answer to my inquiries she gravely informed me she was going to London to see Edward. Only by promising to take her there myself a little later on, could I induce her to return with me to the bank. From thence we made a pleasant little excursion into the country, and as she was quite worn out, I left her with my sister. You will spare her to us just for to-night?"

"You are very kind," mother says, gratefully; "but I am afraid Elsie has put you to a great deal of inconvenience. You spoil her, and really I am afraid we do too. She is a strange child."

"She is a splendid child," answers Mr. Carstairs, quickly. "I wish she were mine. Jove! how she will love one day!"

Mother looks distressed.

"She has deep passions, and I am sometimes afraid of her future."

Poor little Elsie! dear little Elsie! there was no need for fear. Long years ago we laid her quietly to rest. She passed away before the burthen and heat of the day, and who will dare say it was not best; and yet to see her dear, whimsical, smiling, frowning face once more; and that will never be until the grave gives up its dead!

In the morning, Elsie comes home, and neither mother nor father could her; only mother gently tells her of the anxiety she has caused, and begs her to wait with patience for Edward's return.

The child listens gravely, saying nothing until mother has ended, then with a pathetic smile, she presses her slender hands to her side.

"It hurts me here," she says. "It hurts me cruelly to part from friends. I'll try to think it was right of Alice to send him away; but oh! I wish he would come back soon."

She goes about all to day in an absent mood, and at night, when I steal into her room, I find her lying with wide open eyes, gazing out of her window.

"You ought to be asleep, dear!" I say.

"I can't sleep, Nina, because I cannot understand it, try as I will."

"Understand what, Elsie?"

"Something Mr. and Miss Carstairs were saying last night when I lay upon the couch, and they thought I was asleep."

"You should not have listened, child!"

"I tried not, and then I tried to rise and show them I was awake; but my eyes would keep shut, and I was so tired. Even their voices sounded like voices sound in a dream, and yet I do not think I was sleeping. But, if not, what could Mr. Carstairs mean when he said—"

"I don't know if it is right for you to repeat his words, or for me to listen," I say, rising hurriedly, but she catches my skirts and holds me fast.

"Oh, Nina dear, you must hear me. I am afraid there is some trouble for Edward,

and I can't
to you
down.
happens
hate my
I think
Carstairs'
saying, 'A
it is the
that girl
have been
ably. I s
"Mind
warningly
"Oh, I
people oot
ness for t
I cannot
nothing'
"Then
as you ca
will be te
for me.
and make
"If I
ment for
what did
"That
dream," I
turbid in
"I was
want to i
"Go to
think you
your kind
tell no on
were exoi
played yo
"I wish
turns we
asleep wi
At first
presently
without f
almost o
it is the
So the
letters fro
to take a
and to v
Elsie, how
former me
And
quarter
father, r
epend in
draw a
He is gon
and his f
reassurin
there is a
"Some
rising qu
"Band
heavily,
Nina ma
So the
members
in a corn
"Vere
There is
little mo
and his
he has t
ours is r
are wre
there is
Heaven
drel's h
daughter
"Edw
white o
"Father
him mor
"Poor
but you
father s
stained
"In t
quotes A
my prid
father!

and I can't sleep or rest until I have spoken to you. I know you will keep it secret. Sit down. Oh, dear! if anything dreadful happens to Edward or his father, I shall hate myself because I could not help them. I think I had been dozing, and that Mr. Carstairs' voice partly roused me. He was saying, 'Agnes, it is useless to mince matters; it is the only thing left me to do. If only that girl had been reasonable, affairs would have been arranged so much more comfortably. I should have entrusted—'

"Mind the child," Miss Carstairs said, warningly. "Be careful."

"Oh, she is fast asleep. Well, the young people could have got everything in readiness for us. As it is, I must arrange affairs. I cannot confide in Edward. He must guess nothing."

"Then Miss Marston sighed. 'Not so long as you can hide it from him; but the shock will be terrible to him; worse for him than for me. Oh, brother! brother! face it out and make what restitution you can.'

"If I stay, it means life-long imprisonment for me," he answered. Oh, Nina! what did he mean? What does it all mean?"

"That you had a very bad and realistic dream," I say, although I am not a little disturbed in my own mind.

"I was not dreaming. Why should people want to imprison Mr. Carstairs?"

"Go to sleep, Elsie, and forget what you think you heard. Honourable gentlemen like your kind friend are not made prisoners, and tell no one else what you have told me. You were excited and over-tired, and your fancy played you curious tricks."

"I wish I could think so," she sighs, as she turns wearily, and falls almost instantly asleep with the tears yet wet upon her lashes.

At first her words trouble me a little, but presently I determine that they are utterly without foundation, and as the time wears by, almost cease to remember them, and I think it is the same with Elsie.

So the days go on, and there are frequent letters from Edward, who is already beginning to take a great interest in his new way of life, and to wonder, even in his brief notes to Elsie, how he could have been content with his former mode of existence.

And now September is nearly ended. quarter day has come round once more, and father, requiring a larger sum than usual to spend in improvements, goes into Ivydell, to draw a little from his not too large capital. He is gone so long that mother grows anxious, and his face when he returns is by no means reassuring. It is very white and set, and there is a dazed look in his eyes.

"Something has happened!" says mother, rising quickly. "What is it?"

"Send the children away," he answers, heavily. "I want to speak to you. Alice and Nina may stay, they must know soon."

So the boys are sent out, and no one remembers that Elsie is curled up on the couch in a corner of the room.

"Verena, girls, we are all but beggared! There is nothing left to us but your mother's little money; the bank has closed. Carstairs and his sister have gone no one knows where; and he has taken every valuable with him. And ours is not the only sad case; whole homes are wrecked, tradesmen utterly ruined; there is mourning throughout the county. Heavens! to think I have taken that sound-dre's hand in mine, would have given my daughter to his son!"

"Edward's is not the fault!" cries Alice, white of face, and gasping for breath. "Father, he is the soul of honour. I love him more now than ever I did!"

"Poor girl! It is hardest perhaps for you; but you must think no more of him. His father's blood is in his veins, and his name is stained beyond all cleansing."

"In the darkest hour of his darkest night," quotes Alice, "I love him. It is my joy and my pride to cling to him; and, father, dear father! there may be some mistake. Mr.

Carstairs may be unfortunate without being criminal!"

"But he is not. For years his life has been a living lie; no one suspected his embarrassments, not even his confidential clerk, who lies unconscious now. The news of his employer's perfidy brought on paralysis, and it is doubtful if he can recover. It appears he has borrowed large sums of money appropriating them to his own use, and now he has converted all jewels entrusted to him into hard cash, and flown to enjoy life on the proceeds of his crime!"

"I can't believe it; I won't!" cries Elsie's voice behind us. "He was always so good and kind. Everybody liked him!"

"Everybody is cursing him!" retorts my father.

"Only last night I saw him," sobs Elsie, "and he kissed me and asked a blessing on me. He said he was going away for a little while; but I never thought—oh! I never thought he would come back no more."

"Did he say nothing else?" questions father.

"Please don't ask," she answers. "I cannot tell you yet," and he does not press her further.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN we have a little recovered from the past shock of the news, we four, mother, father, Alice, and I, sit down deliberately to face our future. It does not look inviting.

All that is left to us, as we are presently to learn, is one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and what is that amongst so many? Why, it will barely suffice to keep the place in repair.

With a low and bitter cry mother throws her arms about father's neck.

"My dear! my dear! we shall have to leave our home, our own beautiful home, where all our children have been born; where I have lived in happiness since you brought me home your bride!"

"Hush, Verena! hush, my wife!" father says, ever so gently. "Alice has something to say. Let us hear her."

"Nina and I can go out," begins Alice, modestly; "at least, we shall relieve you of some expense, and we may be able to help you a little beside. Some governesses are fairly well paid."

"Oh!" cries mother, "I will not lose my children; anything rather than that; we must think of something else. Now that trouble has come upon us, let us cling the closer together."

"Nina, what have you to propose?" asks my father.

"I am afraid you will not like my suggestion; but we might all keep together if you would do as Mrs. Loftus did when she lost her money."

"What, convert our home into a lodging house?" cries father, irately.

"No," I answer, boldly; "Mrs. Loftus received boarders, a select few who desired refined society, large, airy apartments, all the little luxuries of life. If you would only consent to do as she did, father, we still might remain together; if not, why we must act upon Alice's suggestion."

"For my sake, husband! for my sake!" pleads mother, with tears in her anxious, loving eyes; and, half angry, father promises to give my proposal due consideration.

But the day is a miserable one for us all. Alice goes away to write words of comfort to her lover. Mother and father talk together in low tones, whilst Elsie wanders about like a lost spirit, with pale cheeks and sombre eyes, sighing as she goes. Once she clings about me.

"Nina, shall we be horribly poor? Won't there be enough for the boys to eat and to wear?"

"It will not be so bad as that, dear," I say with an attempt at cheerfulness, and she catches my hand.

"Do you think he meant to do it? Don't you think there is a mistake somewhere?"

"There is none, dear. Mr. Carstairs is a thief. Oh! poor Edward!"

"Poor Mr. Carstairs," she says, heavily. "I pity him most, because he has done wrong; and, oh! he was so kind to me, so kind to me!"

Poor little sister! how your old friend's sins weighed upon your innocent shoulders; how much you suffered secretly and silently because of them. We did not understand it then, afterwards we knew what a great and gentle heart that childish frame concealed.

The next day comes; ah, heavy! heavy day! folks in worse condition than ourselves come to us for advice and sympathy. Throughout the county one name is heard in execration, one man is cursed by high and low, rich and poor; and alas! alas! Edward bears that man's name.

Restless and miserable Alice and I wander about the gardens, the orchard, not trying to comfort each other, lost in the attempt we shall break down.

Not a word has reached us from Edward. Does he know the truth? Will he ever again rush to meet us in his old impulsive way? Oh! what does his father's sin mean to him? The loss of all he prized, riches, honour perhaps the girl he loves; and then as such thoughts bewilder my brain, I hear the sound of a quick, unsteady step along the road. Alice, too, has heard.

"Nina! Nina!" she gasps, catching at me for support, "it is he," and then through the gathering dusk his figure looms, strange and ghostly.

"Edward!" cries my sister, "Edward, do not pass me by. I am waiting for you; but I am weak, and cannot come!"

In an instant he is beside us. My poor Edward! All the brightness has gone from his bonny face, and his eyes are haggard with anguish and shame. He does not seek to touch Alice as she leans against me, he dares not even look at her, but rivets his gaze upon the ground.

"I came," he says, hoarsely, "because all the papers were full of it, and until I had heard with my own ears, and seen with my own eyes, I could not believe the black and devilish truth; even your letter I scarcely seemed to understand. And now I know the awful ruin he—my father—great Heaven! my father!—has wrought, I—I am like one gone mad! Oh!" throwing out his arms with an infinitely despairing gesture. "Oh, Heaven! I dare not lift my eyes to you. To-night, dear love, it is good-bye. For the sake of the old love let your last words be kind!"

And then our Alice flings herself, weeping, upon his breast.

"I never will say these last words! Edward! sweetheart! husband! you never needed me as now you do. Let me go where you go! Let me share your sorrow and what the world may call your shame! But, oh! as you love me, do not leave me behind! Was I cruel in the past? Ah, see! I will be all kindness now, for I love you! love you! love you! and I shall do till I die!"

Not a word does he speak for very long, but his lips are laid to hers, and I think the tears upon her cheeks are not wholly hers. When he does speak his voice is low and unsteady.

"Dear heart, you do not count the cost, you do not guess what life with me would mean now. I am poor, dishonoured, without a prospect of a livelihood before me. Alice! oh Heaven bless you, Alice! you are free. Kiss me, and let me go!"

"If you go," she answers, solemnly, "you take my heart with you. If I wait years and years, and years, until I see your face again, I shall still be yours. If I die before you come to me, your name will be the last I breathe, the last I bless. Edward! Edward! take me with you!" and with a low cry she, reeling back, would fall, but he lays her in my arms.

"Take her!" he cries, hoarsely. "I cannot see her pain and remember my manhood."

and as I receive her into my embrace, a slight figure rubes by me, and follows him, clutching with frantic hands at him—it is Elsie!

"Help me!" I say to her. "Alice has fainted," but she pays not the least attention to me.

"Stop, Edward!" she cries, "I must speak to you, I have a message for you, and a letter. Oh, Edward! oh, Edward! why will you run from us?" and the child sobs piteously, whilst she produces a small packet from her dress pocket. "We all love you," she goes on, a pathetic little quaver in her voice, "we are all sorry for you. Stay with us, and let us comfort you. What does it matter if you are poor? We are poor too."

"Don't, Elsie," he says, with shaking lips, "don't. It is my father who has brought you to poverty. Give me your message and let me go."

"Mr. Carestairs gave me this—I was to trust it into no hands but yours. He said you would learn from it where to find him. And, Edward, don't be too angry with him; perhaps, now, he is sick and sorry; and I can't forget I love him."

He lifts her in his arms and kisses her.

"If I ever see him any more, I will give him your message, but it is not likely, little Elsie. Thank you for the faith you have kept with him, and good-by. Tell Alice to forget me; it is better so," and then he puts her aside, and hastens down the road.

Many, many weary months and years pass before we see his face again.

In some way, Elsie and I contrive to get Alice to the house, and with mother's help she is conveyed to her own room, which she does not leave for several days.

Of Edward we have no news. Later, an old friend tells us he has seen Mr. Carestairs in Spain, and that he looked almost vulgarly prosperous.

There is a great deal of talk about detectives, and warrants are out for his arrest. I don't doubt that if he had been a poor man, who had stolen a shilling to save himself and family from starvation, he would have been taken quickly; but being a thief on a large scale, pursuit is very lukewarm, and, as a matter of fact, he never does receive punishment for his sins.

For Alice's sake, father makes inquiries concerning Edward at the hospital and his lodgings, but without success. He has disappeared as completely as though he never had existed, save in imagination.

And Alice goes about pale and grave; gentler than ever she had been before, and not a moment of her days is wasted. I think she is afraid to be idle, lest thought should linger with and madden her.

All her pretty coquetties have fallen from her; all the mirth has gone from her laughter, and the mischief from her eyes.

But she does not complain; and even when ill-natured folks suggest that Edward knew of his father's embezzlements, and is now sharing in the plunder, she only looks at them with gravely, scornful eyes, but not a word does she say.

Cyril Marston comes over on a visit, and begs her to listen to his suit. I believe even mother wishes he may be successful. But our Alice answers, steadily,—

"There is only one man I will marry. If he never returns, I shall die an old maid," And Elsie upholds her in her resolve, saying,—

"He will come back, dear Allie; and you will be happy yet."

Thanks to influential friends and relatives, the sting of poverty does not touch us. Our dear old home is quickly full of boarders; but for us the place is spoiled, and only the thought that we are all still together reconciles us in any measure to the change. Some of the boarders are young and susceptible, and our Alice is so pretty that they plague her with attentions.

"Will they never let me be at rest?" she says, half fretfully, one day. "Oh!

how they weary me," and then she leans her face upon her hands, and sighs, heavily.

"Nina, I would give every day left me of life only to see Edward once again. I think of him all day long, and dream of him throughout the night. I remember all the harsh words I said to him, and oh! I wish I had bitten out my tongue before ever I uttered them. Nina! Nina!" with a wild cry, "where is he? My heart is breaking with its load of pain and remorse. I know he is not with—that man. He would not live on the fruits of sin. Even now he may be starving, and it was I who sent him out into the world."

"Hush!" I say, trying to stem the current of her woe. "You must not give yourself up to morbid thoughts; and seen in the light of these days it is best that he should go away."

"If he would only write," she cries, twisting her fingers together, "if he would only write! This suspense is killing me!"

"You might advertise," I say, hopelessly. "Perhaps he would see and understand your message."

She catches at my suggestion as a drowning man catches at a straw, and for three successive days this advertisement appears in the principal dailies,—

"Edward, come back. There is no change in me. The Sphinx." That had been one of his many names for her.

On the fourth day comes the reply,—

"Edward to Sphinx. It cannot be. I leave England to-day. Heaven bless you for your love and trust, and teach you to forget me."

"His last words to me," murmurs Alice, under her breath, "his last words! I shall never see him any more. Oh! Edward, oh, Edward!" and with a low cry she falls at my feet.

After this the days go by on leaden wings; but there is so much work to be done, so many duties to be fulfilled, that none of us have time to brood overmuch upon our troubles, and presently Alice's pride helps her to face the world smilingly, and if she finds no good in life, if her pillow is nightly wet with tears, none, save myself and perhaps Elsie, know or guess it.

Suitors she has in plenty, but she has no word of kindness for them.

"If he comes back," she says, "he must find me true in word and thought. I will not offer him a heart that others have shared."

I do not like to dwell upon these months of our lives. They were so sad and dreary, although we all tried to hide this from ourselves and each other.

It was not nice for us to feel our garden was ours no longer; that the pleasant orchard was free to all, that only in our own particular rooms could we be sure of privacy. I think mother and father, though they said so little, felt it worst of any.

Christmas comes, and most of our boarders hurry to "fresh fields and pastures new," so that for a little while we have the blessed consciousness of possessing once again our own dear house.

"This is jolly!" says Elsie, stretching her long legs before her. "I feel as though I am in fairyland. Isn't it nice to be all by ourselves once more? I don't like letting lodgings."

"We don't let lodgings," cries Bertie, sharply. "If a fellow said that I'd knock him down? You aren't a bit of a Musgrave, Elsie. We only oblige people by letting them live with us."

"Fudge!" says Elsie, "don't be a snob. You know we're as poor as Job. Oh! dear, if only I could be as patient! But we don't tell that to everyone who asks; like the spider of schoolroom fame, we say to our 'boarders' 'Will you walk into my parlour?'"

"Elsie, be quiet," says mother. "You should not talk so. The boys will be repeating your words."

"And so I shall be famous! Mother, I

thought, I never said anything worthy of repetition?"

"Go to bed, you monkey!" laughs father, and seeing encouragement in his eyes, Elsie prefers to settle herself upon his knee.

"This is Christmas, Eve," she says. "Mother always allows us an extra hour, and I am not a bit sleepy. Let us sing some carols. It is so nice to be alone."

So we sing ballads and hymns indiscriminately, and mother, with a smile saying it is the eve of father's birthday, sings in her still sweet voice, "Many Happy Returns of the Day." But when she comes to the words,—

"But if 'midst the greetings there's one that we miss,

And that one was dearest of all,"—

Elsie gives a sharp cry of "Don't mother! I can't bear it! They are both gone now. Oh, mother! mother!" and then Alice has her fast in her arms, and is weeping with her, and with her arm still about her, half, leads, half carries her from the room.

"A merry Christmas," says Elsie, through her tears. "A merry Christmas to you all!"

And even now I can see her as she halted in the doorway weeping for her lost friends, smiling for us; and still I catch the flatter of her garments as Alice led her upstairs, acting and petting her the while. Dear Elsie, it is her last Christmas with us!

CHAPTER V.

With the coming of the New Year there is a change in Elsie, so slight at first that we scarcely notice it, but growing daily more pronounced, until mother's face takes an anxious look, and her eyes grow troubled as they follow the child about.

She has always been the life and soul of the family, so full of animal spirits and young, strong life; she has never had a day's illness, and we have grown to regard her as a miracle of health and vigour, but now a strange languor possesses her, she is easily tired, and seems losing all her old love of romping.

"I believe I am growing lazy!" she says one day, as she curls herself up on the rug before the fire. "I like best to lie here and dream day-dreams—perhaps it is because I am getting older, that I don't care any longer for snow-balling or sliding. Depend upon it that's the solution of the mystery. Why, mother dear, how grave you look; what is it? Have I said anything wrong?"

"No, dear, but I'm wondering if you feel quite well and strong."

"I'm all right," answers Elsie who hates what she calls a fuss. "I am only lazy, and the weather is too cold for getting about much. I'm quite a fire spaniel."

"But you need not to be," insists mother. "You always preferred winter to summer until now."

"Who is it says that one changes in every seven years?" asks Elsie, musingly. "I'm turned fourteen, and I guess I am beginning to change from a romp to a proper young lady. Oh! you'll be proud of me yet! You'll envy my 'prunes and cream' style," and she stretches out her long legs in anything but a ladylike fashion. Mother stooping lays her hand gently upon the rascal's head.

"Tell me truly, Elsie, do you feel ill?"

"No, mother, only lazy; don't bother, let me lie here and enjoy the quiet and warmth. Soon the boys will be in, and then we shall have no peace!" so we leave her undisturbed, and presently she falls into a light slumber; but as she sews from time to time mother looks at her lying there with flushed cheeks, and parted lips, and the trouble deepens on her face.

For a few days after this Elsie is more like her old self, and makes spasmodic attempts to romp or slide with the boys; but always she returns so exhausted that mother forbids such exertions, and, taking counsel with father,

decides to call in Dr. Barnaby. But Elsie expostulates fiercely,—

"She is quite well. She will not be physiced and prescribed for; she is only a little languid and lazy, and the weather has been so trying—with the spring she will recover strength and spirits;" and, seeing that she is in earnest, they yield to her wishes. But when March is drawing near she develops a short, dry cough, and it is impossible any longer to hide how really ill she is.

She has grown very thin, and there is a bright speck of colour on either cheek which serves only to intensify the brilliancy of her large dark eyes. Mother sends for Dr. Barnaby, who, having examined Elsie carefully, begs to see father.

"You may tell me all there is to know," mother says, with a tragic look on her face, "for my child's sake I will not break down."

He glances out of the window to where Elsie is slowly and languidly walking; and his eyes as they come back to mother are very painful.

"My dear Mrs. Musgrave; I dare not buoy you up with hope—from the first there has been none for the child—she is in a rapid decline!"

Mother catches her breath sharply, and trembles so, that Alice takes her in her arms. Then she stands erect.

"Don't touch me—don't notice me—I shall be myself soon," and then a moment later she turns deprecatingly to the doctor.

"I beg your pardon—the blow was so sharp and unexpected, it unnerved me a little—thank you for your candour, any certainty is better than suspense."

But when he is gone, she hurries to her own room, and locks the door against us all. When she comes down again she is very pale but calm, though her eyes bear traces of weeping. Oh, this heavy day! We scarcely dare venture to look at each other; we speak in low tones as though in the presence of the dead, and father's face is stern with his efforts at self-repression.

Only the boys and Elsie herself are ignorant of the doom pronounced; and as the days wear by and each strives to minister to all her needs, to encompass her with loving care, she regards us half-suspiciously.

"Why are you all so anxious to serve me?" she asks. "Am I more ill than I believe. Do you think I am going to die?" in an awed voice. "Oh, mother! mother! not that! I am so young, and I so love this beautiful world," and then a storm of sobs shakes her poor, frail little body, and mother cannot answer for the pain tearing at her heart. Presently she falls asleep, and when she wakes she seems to have forgotten all about her agitation and its cause. But a few evenings later, when father has drawn her down upon his knee, and her head lies on his breast she says, dreamily,—

"Do you remember one day, dad, telling me I was precocious, and asking me what became of precocious children? I said folks made prodigies of them, but don't you think ever so much oftener they die?"

Under his moustache his mouth quivers with pain, and he strains her close, bending his face low over her head.

"Elsie, my darling, little Elsie! You do not wish to leave us?"

"No," in a low voice, "I would like to stay, I have been so happy, so happy, I do not wish to die; but oh! daddy! daddy! I must," and then she cries weakly against his breast, and no one speaks a word because this grief is too deep for speech. But, presently, Elsie looks up with one of her bright smiles. "What a selfish little wretch I am to make you all so unhappy; let us forget for awhile that I am ill, and be as we used to be when Edward was with us. How long ago it seems!"

Then, as the month advances and she grows weaker, so she becomes more reconciled to what she knows now is inevitable, and rarely sheds a tear or laments over her fate.

"I should like to live to see the flowers again," she says to me one day, "and oh! if only they would come back, I think I shouldn't mind anything quite so much then. Nina dear, I know everybody says he was a very wicked man—I suppose he was, but he was kind to me, and I am so hungry to see him again. Oh, I don't think any one was ever so kind and patient with me in my well days as he was; it did not matter how I teased or worried him, he would only smile and smooth my hair. And that night, when I stayed at Rentfrew House, I was so weary he carried me upstairs, and would not go to bed himself, until he heard I was comfortably asleep. You do not wonder I remember and love him still, Nina?"

"No, dear; there are times when even I cannot be so angry with him. I think if Edward would come back I could quite forgive him; but when I look at Alice, my heart grows hard again. All the gladness has gone out of her life."

"Poor Alice!" she says, dreamily, "it is hardest of all for her!"

Quite at the close of March, she takes to her bed, and we all know the end is near. One day, as she lies with closed lids and parted lips, Alice enters softly.

"Is she asleep, Nina?"

"No," answers Elsie for herself, "come in, you are not disturbing me!"

"See," says Alice, advancing softly, "see dear Elsie, what I have brought you. I have been hunting under all the hedgerows."

"Oh!" cries Elsie, opening her eyes wide with delight. "Violets! how sweet they are! How good of you to take so much trouble for me," and the thin white fingers go straying tenderly over the purple blossoms.

"Shall I place them in water for you, dear?"

"No, let me have them here upon my pillow, beside me," and with a contented little smile, she lies back again, the violets just touching her pallid cheeks.

To-night she appears so much worse that none of us think of retiring. The servants have gone to their rooms, and just now the house is quite empty of boarders, so that absolute quiet reigns. I start with a cry, when a low knock sounds at the hall door.

"You are nervous Nina," says father, as he rises to open it; and then we hear the bolts withdrawn, and presently father's voice, stern and harsh.

"You!" and another that says.—

"Yes, let me in, Musgrave. I heard—no matter how—that the little lass was dying, and I could not let her go out of the world without good-bye."

"Do you know what risk you are running?"

"Yes, I know; but I am provided with disguise, and you are not the man to betray an old friend. You will let me see her?"

"She would wish it, come in," and my father brings him in; but he is not the friend of our childhood and youth. All his old bonhomie is gone. The courtly, affable gentleman has disappeared for ever, and in his place is a furtive, care-worn looking man—a man who seems to expect a foe in all he meets. Truly the way of transgressors is hard. With a deprecatory gesture, he says,—

"Won't you speak to me, Nina, or you Alice?"

"Yes," she answers, "tell me where to find Edward, that I may assure him of my unchanged love and devotion."

"I do not know," he answers, heavily "he has forgotten I am his father. I never heard from him but once after I left here, and then he utterly repudiated me."

"Then you can tell me nothing?" Alice cries, despairingly.

"Nothing," he is as lost to me as though he were dead!

She falls back from him, and, sinking into a chair, covers her face with her hands; and he, perhaps, unable to bear the sight of the misery his sin has wrought, turns again to father.

"Take me to the child now, I dare not stay. By this time to-morrow, I must be out of England again."

"Come!" is all father says as he leads the way, and I follow, feeling if best Alice should be alone a little while."

Elsie is lying with wide open eyes—the violets are still beside her. She turns her head wearily as we enter; then, seeing Mr. Carstairs, smiles brightly, and stretches out her hand to him.

"I knew you would come if you could," she says "I am very glad."

"It is worth all the pain and risk I have undergone, to hear you say that," he answers, kneeling by her so that his face is on a level with hers. "Elsie, you do not hate me too much to let me kiss you? You know how wicked I have been?"

"Yes, I know, but I am sorry for you—sorrow, I think, then you can be for yourself. You may kiss me. We were always such good friends—you and I—and I have missed you so much. Why did not Edward come?"

At a warning glance from mother he answers,—

"He was too far away. There was no time."

"You will carry my love to him and to Miss Carstairs. You will tell them I never forget them, and oh! dear Mr. Carstairs, if you love me, and I know you do, give back some of those poor people, what should be theirs. Some of them are very poor. Will you try to do this for my sake?"

"I will try! Oh, Elsie, little Elsie! How I envy you!"

"Yes, I shall soon be at rest now!" gently. "I shall rest the better because of your promise to me," and her little thin hands steal out to clasp his.

He does not stay long, perhaps he dare not, but when he rises from his knees, there are tears upon his cheeks, which fall like rain upon the child's face as he stoops to kiss her farewell. He carries away her violets with him, and years after we hear that when they buried him those faded flowers went with him too.

In the hall he pauses.

"Good-bye!" he says, "Good-bye, Musgrave. You will never see me any more. I wronged you cruelly; let me make you some restitution!" and he endeavours to thrust a packet into father's hand, but he draws quickly back.

"I am not a thief, neither am I the only one to whom you should make restitution. There are those who actually need bread, thanks to your villainy."

"You are rough on me—you don't know how it all came about—the difficulties which arose—the temptation to which I succumbed. Let me tell you something of my past?"

"I wish to hear nothing. It is enough for me that you are a rogue and a thief; let there be no further speech between us."

And then the hall-door closes upon him, and we see him no more; but even now I often think of him, and try to understand his complex character and always fail; he was such a curious mixture of cruelty and kindness, greed and generosity, falsehood and truth. Thank Heaven, only the good in his nature descended to his son. The evil was all his own.

In early April, quite painlessly and quietly, Elsie passes away, and is buried. Not in the old vault, but where she herself desired to lay, with the trees waving above her, the grass green upon her quiet breast, with the early daffodils making a golden glory all around and about her, and with us life goes on quietly and sadly. We miss her bright step and merry laugh, the sunny smiling face, the mirthful mocking eyes—oh, such a gap as she has left in the little circle! Her chair stands in its old accustomed place, and sometimes I catch mother's eyes wandering towards it, and hear her deep drawn sigh which, for father's sake, she strives to stifle. Little sister! Little sister, we never knew how much we loved you until we lost you!

It would have hurt Elsie cruelly to know

that Mr. Carstairs never kept his promise to her; but she is beyond all knowledge now, and we try to think that it is best she should go; but it is hard, cruelly hard!

The weeks and the months go dragging on, and still not a word or a line from Edward. We do not know whether he lives or is dead; and Cyril Marston once more renews his suit to Alice, only to be again rejected.

"You are waiting for one who will never return," he says, angrily.

"I shall wait for him all my life if need be!" she answers.

"But think. What can he give you? neither wealth nor position, and only a name soiled beyond redemption!"

"So long as that name is his I shall wear it proudly—his father's crime is not his—he is not the worse man for it. Say no more, Mr. Marston—I love him, I shall love him so long as Heaven grants me life and memory. Forget me, for never can I be more to you than the friend I would willingly be."

And now, when two years have gone by in silence and sadness, she still clings to that resolve; still watches and waits for Edward's coming, and will not suffer hope to die in her faithful heart.

CHAPTER VI.

At the end of the second year, mother's only sister, who, for her husband's sake, has long been resident in Italy, returns to England a widow; and, with her son, stays a few days at Ivydell with us.

It was her husband's wish that Cousin Hubert should at once settle in the home of his ancestors, and learn to know his own people.

"It is a big place," says Aunt Lucinda, "I shall feel completely lost there. Our Neapolitan Villa was such a snug, compact house; but, of course, my home is with Hubert, at least, until he marries. Verena, you might spare me one of your girls, if not for good at least for awhile. She should be to me as my own daughter!"

"I know, dear," mother answers; "but since Elsie died I feel I cannot bear to lose sight of my bairns."

"You cannot keep them always; they will go to homes of their own one day, for you must know the girls are rather more than attractive. Let me have one of them for a month then; and I promise she shall be no expense to you in the future. Which is it to be? You surely have not the heart to deny me so small a boon?"

Mother looks at us.

"Well, girls, what do you say?"

Alice flushes from throat to brow.

"Let me stay at home," she says. "He might come at any time, and he must not find me away. I know I am selfish, Nina."

"No," I interrupt, quickly, "you are not; and I should like very much to go, if aunt will be satisfied with me."

For, to confess the truth, I am longing for a change, because home is not what it used to be, and in all my life I have never slept under any roof but this. What is more natural than that I should welcome any break in the monotony? Aunt looks pleased as she kisses me.

"Well then, Nina, you shall be my little daughter, so long as your parents will spare you. Here comes Hubert, I must tell him of our arrangement, I am sure he will be delighted."

Tall and broad-shouldered, he lounges into the room, and aunt instantly tells him the news. His evident pleasure makes me shy and hot, and I wish aunt would not look so significantly at me.

"What jolly hearing, mother. The place will seem more homelike with Nina flitting about it. For my word, Nina, I know hardly more of Eldest Hall than you; it is years since we lived there. All my holidays were spent abroad, the remainder of the year at

school—I think I was not more than ten when I last saw home; so together we can explore all the rooms, every nook and cranny of the grounds. I am promising myself a high old time; and, Aunt Verena, you may expect to see Nina again when we are tired of her, and I do not think that will be ever!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," I say, laughing. "I may yet refuse to go; I have no wish to be kept prisoner; and, indeed, were you to attempt to hold me against my will, I am vain enough to think I should circumvent you!"

"Isn't it good to hear her talk," cries Hubert. "The small, impudent creature has sufficient assurance for ten girls her size!"

"No," says mother, smiling. "Nina is most decidedly the meek one of my flock."

"Oh, angels and ministers of grace!" cries my cousin, "what then are the others? Now, Alice is, to my mind, meek and docile," glancing after my sister, who is now walking up and down the terrace.

Mother sighs as her gaze follows his.

"You did not know her two years' ago, Hubert; then she was the embodiment of saucy happiness."

"Poor Alice! My dear Verena, don't you think that in change of scene she would find forgetfulness, and it is hard all her life should be wasted for the sake of one who does not care to give her a sign of his remembrance or existence!"

"Aunt," I cry, "you don't quite understand Edward and his silence. He thinks that if he makes no sign, she will forget him and be happy with some more prosperous lover—and she, oh! Heaven, bless our Alice—she will never forget him so long as she lives!"

"I like to hear you speak like that of our ill-starred lovers," Hubert whispers. "When we are at home you shall tell me all the story, and if I can help them you must show me how to do it. I am a rich man, Nina, and I promise you I will spare no expense to find and bring back Alice's lover!"

"How can I thank you?" I answer, shaken by a great gladness, and he with a smile says, "One day I will tell you!"

Three days later we go down to Eldest—such a lovely old place! Aunt is very quiet, thinking of the day when she came there first a bride; but I do not think she is grieving much, for Lucas Eldest had not been the husband of her choice nor had he been kind to her. Hubert and I are excited as children, and, fatiguing as the journey has been, we cannot rest until we have explored all the spacious rooms and long corridors.

"To-morrow," says my cousin, "we will 'do' the grounds; but now you must be as tired as a dog. After dinner you must go to your room; we shall all be glad to rest, but in the morning I shall be waiting to show you over the place."

"I shall be ready."

In the days that follow I am very happy; and Aunt Lucinda is so kind, so tender, so anticipates my every wish and want, that I think of the time when I must leave her with something like dismay, and Hubert—oh, I cannot tell you what he is to me; for there has come to me, too, the crowning joy of woman's life—with all my heart I love him, and believe he returns my love.

My four weeks have stretched into six, and still aunt presses me to stay, and mother says no word to recall me. But one day I get a letter from Alice which makes me eager to go to her, and congratulate her upon what I know must be a great joy to her. This is the one noteworthy paragraph in it.

"A large sum of money has been transmitted by Messrs. Blake and Windsor, bankers, to Laurence Holden, the Ivydell solicitor, in trust for the sufferers from Mr. Carstairs' extensive embezzlements. And whilst refusing to give their client's address, they acknowledge that he is Edward—my Edward—and that he has vowed to make up all the defalcations. Can you wonder now that I am content to wait years and years and years for him? When he has discharged what he

believes his debt he will come to me. Oh, Nina, Nina! I am a proud and happy woman to-day—let no one pity me—rather let them envy me that I have given my heart into such noble keeping!"

Without a word I give the letter to Hubert, and when he has read it through, he says,—

"He is a brick; but what a confounded shame that he and Alice should suffer such long separation because of his soundly father. Nina, we must get him back. I want to know him—I want to help him—though from this he appears to be prospering. Way, little woman, how serious you are, of what are you thinking?"

"That I ought to go home. I should like to share Alice's gladness; she has suffered so long, and cousin—"

"Hubert, if you please," he interrupts. "I object to the cousin, it has such a stand-offish sound. Are you tired of us, Nina, that you would go home on the slightest pretext? Alice has your mother to sympathise with her in her joy, we have only you!"

"But," I falter, "I have already stayed longer than I intended."

"Won't you stay longer still?" he asks, quickly, "will you stay always as my wife, dear Nina? Give me your hands, let me look into your eyes and read my answer there. Darling, can you love me half as much as Alice does her absent one?"

Then I take courage to lift my eyes to his, and what I see there strengthens me to tell him all the truth.

"Oh, yes," I say, "I love you, Hubert with all my heart—only I am so poor and not in any way clever."

But he will not let me go further; catching me in his arms he kisses me again and again until I am breathless, and I scarcely can see his face for the happy tears that will come. Then aunt, too, is so kind.

"I have wished it from the first, dear child," she says. "I hope it will not be long before my daughter comes to me!"

Then, of course, the news must be written to father and mother, and I send a little note myself to Alice, telling her of the great and wonderful joy that has come to me, and praying her to remember that in the midst of my happiness I was not forgetful of her.

Dear Alice! what a loving, tender answer she sends, although I am sure the contrast between my lot and hers must have hurt her sorely; but of this she gives no sign.

And when at last I return to Ivydell, only to prepare for my wedding, she is the first to meet me with smiles and kisses, with no shadow on her sweet, pale face, no gloom in the depths of her beautiful, steadfast eyes.

So I am married, and mother, weeping over my bridal finery, says the old circle was broken up when our Elsie went away, and never any more can we be quite the same. Alice touches her gently.

"Do not send her away with a heavy heart, mother dear. You have still me, and she is going into a good man's keeping. Heaven bless you, Nina! oh Heaven bless you!" she adds, turning to me swiftly, "make and keep you happy. Good-bye, good-bye, dear sister. I will not trust myself to say that word when others are near," and so she lays her face to mine a moment whilst she holds me in her close embrace.

"Oh, Alice! Alice! if only I could believe you happy," I cry.

"I am not unhappy," she answers, steadily. "He is alive, and he is not in poverty. I can wait until he comes again."

Never once does she doubt him, judging his heart by her own heart of gold; and so she holds on her way serenely whilst the weeks wax and wane, whilst the year is born and dies; through all the seasons "of bud and bloom, and snow;" reeking little of others who fain would woo and win her; holding the treasure of her love close, hoarding "it still for Edward."

And still ever and anon come fresh remit-

laughes from him to Mr. Holden, and at such times mother writes,—

"Alice is so changed; all her sadness and depression gone. She is glorying in his honesty and labour; do not think of her as miserable, her faith and love alone sustain and cheer her."

The seasons come and go, I have been three years a wife, and two a mother. It is five since Edward went away, and the giddy ones of Ivydell begin to speak of our Alice as an old maid, she having now turned twenty-five, when there comes a letter from Messrs. Blake and Windsor, saying their client is returning to England, and may be expected at any time.

"Oh, Heaven! I thank thee," is all Alice says as she flies to her own room, from which she does not emerge again that day.

CHAPTER VII.

HUBERT and I are staying at Ivydell, making up quite a family party, and daily, almost hourly, we are expecting Edward's advent.

One sunny morning in September brings a line from him to Alice, and her face grows white as death as she recognises the familiar handwriting. Without a word she goes away to her own room, and no one seeks to follow or disturb her.

When again she joins us, she is still pale and tremulous with her happiness, but in her dear eyes the glory of a satisfied love is shining. She lays her head on mother's shoulder in a very abandonment of joy.

"He is coming," she whispers, "he will be with us to-night," and so they sit a little while with clasped hands, saying nothing, but understanding well what each is feeling, and content.

Then, when she has recovered something approaching her ordinary manner, Alice rises, and with a queer uncertain laugh, turns to me.

"You must help me, Nina, to look my best. Come with me to choose the gown I am to wear. You do not think," wistfully, "he will be disappointed to find me changed—for I am changed?"

"You are lovelier than ever," I say, "and are a goose not to know it."

This evening she wears white. Edward had always liked her best in colourless robes, and in her happiness she looks scarcely older than the Alice who had been wont to tease and lecture him in the old days.

Together we walk in the garden, bright and fragrant yet; and the short afternoon closes in, the dusk is already gathering before we hear the step for which we wait, and through the chestnut alleys see a man's figure coming towards us.

It is Edward, changed, bronzed, bearded—with the look of a man who has toiled long, and suffered much, but still Edward; and, with a low cry, Alice puts out her hands to him. In a moment they are caught and held fast, and he is gazing into the depths of her dear eyes.

"Is this still my girl?" he asks, in a voice all shaken by feeling.

"Now and always!"

"In spite of all the shame and sorrow?"

"The shame was not yours, the sorrow I have shared. Oh, Edward! Edward! my heart has been starving all these years. Why did you not come or write?"

He says something in so low a tone, the words do not reach me, and then he has her safe in his arms, and she is sobbing like a wild thing. As quickly and quietly as possible I effect my escape, leaving the reunited lovers to their new found happiness. Of course I carry the tidings to the rest of the family. Mother says,—

"Thank Heaven, he has returned! I always loved Edward."

"And I," answers father, gravely. "But

had he not proved himself true gold I would not have given my child to him. I should have been afraid that the taint of evil was in his blood."

Long, long after the lovers join us, looking very conscious; and I think the greeting accorded Edward would have satisfied the most exacting.

When we are all more composed, and he has rested a little, he tells us of his life since he left us mad with shame and grief, and believing all along that Alice was lost to him.

"As soon as I could I shipped to Australia and went to the diggings. At first ill-luck followed me everywhere and in everything I did. Then came a change, and I began to hoard my hard-won treasures in the hope of repaying the sums he—had embezzled.

"It was cruel work, but my purpose sustained me—I never forgot that! I sometimes hoped when it was accomplished I should come home and find my sweetheart waiting for me, but that was not often. I remembered her loveliness, and thought some worthier, luckier fellow would one day call her wife. You see, with a fond glance at Alice, I did not then know the strength and constancy of a woman's love.

"Well, for three years I stuck to the diggings, though I hated the life and the coarse companionship one was obliged to endure. Then, the only man of whom I had made a friend, like myself, the victim of an untoward fate, and I, added our hoardings together, and going further into the country, started a sheep farm, and we have prospered beyond our wildest hopes. Then I could no longer endure the longing for home—and the dear girl I loved—so leaving everything in Jim Maitland's charge I crossed to England from Melbourne. And now I must tell you just exactly what my prospects are.

"I am considered a wealthy man, but I only live in comfort. I have as yet discharged only a third of my debt. I shall never rest until the whole is paid. It is conscience money. Neither do I propose ever residing in England. I could not hold up my head where men know my father's crime. If I married and had children I could not endure they should ever suffer reproach or indignities because of him. My living lies out there; the life suits me. Alice, will you consent to go out with me?"

"Where you go I must follow," she answers. "My life lies in your hands."

But mother begins to weep bitterly.

"Stay with us, Edward. If you take her from us we shall never see her again."

"I will bring her back to you. You may trust her happiness to me, for Heaven knows that with all my soul I love and honour her. Or if your heart fails you come out with us."

"No," says mother. "I will live and die, please Heaven, under the shelter of this dear roof. And did we go out, as you propose, I should be losing three children instead of one. Oh! my boy, my dear boy, no one reviles you for your father's sin—you are morbid. Cannot you conquer this dread of reproach, and stay with us?"

"If I stayed it would be as a soured and broken-spirited man. I should imagine indignities where none existed. I should be ever on the alert for insults. Mr. Masgrave, what do you say to me? Will you trust your daughter to my care and love?"

"I trust you. It is for Alice to decide what she will do with her life."

And then she rises, trembling pitifully, but there is no uncertainty in eye or voice as she says gently,—

"Mother! father! I think you know I love you as dearly as a daughter should; but my love for Edward is different, and in a way greater. I am his wife at heart—soon in name. Where he goes I go—glad and confident; and Heaven grant we may never any more be parted."

"You have decided, Alice," says father. "It is hard to let you go, but you have done right. Heaven bless you, dear child!"

"And teach us how to bear our loss," sobs mother.

And then Alice throws her arms about her, and I do not think theirs are the only wet eyes; but suddenly, with a smile flashing through her tears, my sister turns to Edward, and giving him her hand says,—

"Do not think I regret. Oh, no! no! Only—if I could take all my dear ones with me."

"I understand," answers Edward, gravely, "and I know all that you are sacrificing for me. Oh, my sweet! Heaven make and keep me worthy of you."

Well, they are married, and Alice passes from our midst. Her first request to her husband is that he will forgive his father for her sake, and before quitting Europe will see and speak with him.

He hesitates a moment before answering, then says,—

"It shall be as you wish, my wife. You have been my good angel and my salvation. I can deny you nothing."

So it is that they spend a day with Mr. Carstairs at Lisbon, where Edward discovers he is staying; and I think my new brother is glad afterwards to think they parted as friends, because he never sees his father again. A year later Mr. Carstairs dies—it is whispered by his own hand—but this is never proved, and Miss Carstairs retires into a French convent.

Poor lady! hers was a bitter lot; knowing her brother's perfidy all along she yet had clung to him—perhaps one does not wonder about her fidelity overmuch, for I remember she told me once Mr. Carstairs in all his life had never given her an angry word or unkind look. But the sorrow his sins had caused her had sapped her strength, and his sudden death hastened her end. She lived only long enough to receive a loving message from Edward, praying her to go out to him, and make her home with him. Then she passed quietly away amongst the sisters, and in our hearts we were glad that her troubles now were ended.

Of his ill-gotten gains Mr. Carstairs left absolutely nothing; in fact, but for Edward's generosity to him, he must have starved in a foreign land. He lies at rest in a remote little cemetery, and my heart softens towards him when I remember that Edith's violets are yet upon his breast.

Of Bertie and Harry there is only good to tell. The first is a rising young lawyer, for it is now five years since our Alice sailed away, and the latter is making his mark as a journalist. Father says, with a proud smile, that the glory of the Masgraves will yet return, and that Bertie will be a fitting representative of our good old race.

Five years since Alice went away; and now the heavy debt is paid, and Edward may boldly face the world, having cleared his father's name; and we are all gathered at the old home waiting our dear girl, for he is bringing her to us on a gloriously long visit. Mother and I stand watching at the gate—my brood of youngsters playing close by, what an old woman I am growing, father and the boys have gone to meet our guests; and now we listen for the sound of carriage wheels, when all at once a figure darts from among the bushes. A pair of arms clasp mother and I in one strong embrace, and Alice, laughing, crying, kissing and fondling us, says,—

"I left the others to see to the luggage and came on alone; I was so hungry to have you in my arms again. Oh, Nina! are these your children? Let me know them now—and, mother, I think you will allow I may well be proud of my two bonnie bairns. Oh, dear! it is like Heaven to be home again!"

"You look happy my dear one!"

"I am! I only want you all out in my new home to make my lot perfection."

When later my sister conveys her "babies"

to bed, Edward turns to us with a great light on his face.

"I know now what a priceless treasure you entrusted to me," he says in a low voice; "she is a queen among women; all I have, and all I am, I owe to her."

Under her breath mother whispers, "Heaven bless our Alice, and 'Amen' is the natural response from our full and happy hearts."

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

THE busy haunts of men—their consciences.

How to get a woman to keep a secret—give her chloroform.

A WICKED CONSTRUCTION.—Marie "I'm within ten years of thirty-six." Maria: "Mercy! you are not forty-six, are you?"

He: "The sound of your voice reminds me of the music of a brook." She (flattered): "Indeed?" He: "Yes. You see it rolls on for ever."

A MINISTER, putting his hand upon an robin's shoulder, exclaimed, "My son, I believe the devil has got hold of you." "I believe so, too," was the reply.

A YOUNG man sent to a firm that advertised a recipe to prevent bad dreams. He received a slip of paper on which was written, "Don't go to sleep."

"Wonderfully versatile woman, my wife," said Watts. "She'll sit up half the night talking the baby to sleep, and the other half talking me awake."

IMMIGRANT: "At last I am in free America. A man can do pretty much as he pleases in this country, can't he?" Native: "Y-e-s, unless he's married."

OVERHEARD at the wedding: "It was a case of love at first sight, was it not?" "No sight about it. She got on the blind side of him from the start."

DEBTOR: One who owes you money which he must pay. Creditor: One to whom you owe money which you will not pay if you can help it.

THE HONEST BOY.—Sunday School Teacher: "Johnnie, did you ever tell a lie?" Johnnie (promptly): "Yes, sir." Sunday School Teacher: "Thanks. I thought I was going to catch you in another one."

THE OLD BEAU (rooking little Anna on his knee for Aunt Susan's sake): "I suppose that is what you like, Anna?" Anna: "Yes, it's very nice. But I rode on a real donkey in the park yesterday."

CLARA: "Auntie, why is a certain era known as the medieval?" Auntie: "I—er—think it means the middle age, dear. And it is called so because so many middle-aged men are made evil."

SHE: "Don't you think you had better have a shine? Your shoes are very dingy." He: "Why, they don't need it; they are patent leather." "The patent must have expired; you had better get it renewed."

"I don't see how you make your patients obey you, doctor. A man who is fond of high living never will diet." "He can't help himself, madam. When he has paid my bill he has to reduce his living."

BOLIVAR (an enthusiastic advocate of cremation): "I wrote the Cremation Company last week, asking them to file my formal application to be cremated." "Ah! Did you receive a reply?" "O, yes. They told me to come early and avoid the rush."

MERELY A SLIGHT DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.—"I don't meet you at Miss Svelte's any more." "No; she and I have had a difference of opinion." "Nothing serious, I hope!" "Oh, no; only I thought I was the man she ought to marry and she thought I wasn't."

"MADAM, are you a woman suffragist?" "No, sir; I haven't time to be." "Haven't time! Well, if you had the privilege of voting, whom would you support?" "The same man I have supported for ten years." "And who is that?" "My husband."

THE RESULT OF TRAINING.—"This, ladies and gentlemen, is the celebrated trick mule 'Dot,'" said the clown, as the animal was being led into the ring. "After many years of effort I am able to say I can make him do anything that he wants to."

OLD GENTLEMAN (in the park): "What are you doing, my little dear?" Little Girl (with doll): "I am giving dolly a drink." "Giving dolly a drink, eh? But the water is running down all over her pretty dress." "Yes, she slobbers a good deal. All babies do."

FRIEND: "Whatever has turned your hair so grey, Retchid?" Retchid: "I dyed it grey." F.: "Dyed it grey! Why?" R.: "My wife made me, because her hair has turned very grey. She won't allow me to look younger than she does!"

THE deacon's wife wanted to jot down the text, and, leaning over to her scapegrace nephew, she whispered: "Have you a card about you?" "You can't play in chapel!" was his solemn, reproving answer, and the good woman was so flustered that she forgot all about the text.

SAID an exasperated father at the dinner table—"You children turn up your noses at everything on the table. When I was a boy I was glad to get enough dry bread to eat." "I say, pa, you are having a much better time of it now that you are living with us, ain't you?" remarked little Tommy.

"WHAT! You shook a tablespoon out of the window into the street when shaking the tablecloth, and didn't go down after it?" "No," answered the domestic. "If it was a tin one, it wasn't worth going down two flights of steps for; and if it was silver, some one would have got it before I could get there."

ANGRY HOUSEHOLDER: "How much will you take to leave the neighbourhood at once?" Leader of the Little German Band: "One shilling." Angry Householder: "You ask too much." Leader of Little German Band: "Ish dot so? Vell, we blays von more tune, and den you see if dot's too mooch."

A VERY tall and helmeted policeman was passing down one of the streets of a northern town the other day. Two juveniles were looking at this majestic emblem of the law as he passed, when one of them said to the other: "Jimmie, what's that sharp thing on the top of his helmet for?" "Dae ye no ken, ye gowt, that that's the lightning conductor?" was the instant reply.

A MOTHER was calling the attention of her little boy to the moon, which was to be seen clearly but pellidly in the early afternoon. "Why, you can't see the moon in the daytime!" replied the youngster. "Oh, yes, you can—there it is over the trees!" The little fellow looked, and had to admit the fact that he saw it, but he added, "Taint lighted anyhow!"

"Your song needs ventilation, I should say," remarked the critic, kindly, when the composer had finished trying it on him. "I don't quite understand," and the singer's mystification showed in his face. "The air is so bad, don't you know," explained the critic so clearly that the singer got up and went outside to mingle with evening atmosphere.

"By gum," growled a man, holding his grippy head with both hands. "I feel just like I did once when I got drunk on cider and whisky." "I don't doubt it," said his wife, who was a strong temperance woman, "and if you had never done it you wouldn't know how much you are suffering now." He looked at her in a vague uncertain sort of way for a minute or two, and not being able to grasp her thought, simply grunted and swore.

"I NEVER hear anything that's said against me," remarked the deaf man.

THE secret a woman keeps is the year she was born in.

SOME one asks, "Who is the really happy man?" Some other man.

A CRIC has said that all men are brothers—Cains and Abels.

It frequently happens that an easy-tyred cab has an easy-tired horse in front.

A MAN'S idea of being good to a woman is to give her opportunities to be good to him.

THE saddest consequences of a great man's death are the verses that are written to his memory.

"You broke that boy all up." "No harm done. He is so simple it won't be hard to put him together again."

"THE sun is a great detective," said the girl at the seashore, as she looked at the freckles on her face. "It is always spotting somebody."

LADY ROCK AGENT (to frascible man): "Why do you swear at me, sir?" Man: "Because, madam, gallantry forbids me throwing you out of the window."

"Is there any art in drinking wine?" asks a western contemporary. There is, but there is still greater art in getting over drinking wine the next morning.

A YOUNG lawyer appointed to defend a prisoner dressed in a sailor's costume, addressed the jury very pathetically in behalf of "this child of the sad sea waves—this nursing of the storm." At the close of his remarks it was discovered that his client was on a canal boat. The "child of the sad sea waves" got six months.

THEY had been married about two months, and they still loved each other devotedly. He was in the back yard blacking his shoes. "Jack!" she called, at the top of her voice, "Jack, come here, quick!" He knew at once she was in imminent danger. He grasped a poker, and rushed up two flights of stairs to the rescue. He entered the room breathlessly, and found her looking out of the window. "Look," said she, "that's the kind of bonnet I want you to get me."

DURING a vice-regal tour in the West of Ireland, one of the suite, who had been told that the natives would be sure to agree with anything and everything he said to them, determined to test the truth of the assertion. Accordingly, in one of the coasting trips with which the tour was interspersed, and in which the wind was blowing half a gale, he shouted to the Irish pilot, "There's very little wind." The answer came back at once: "Thrus for you, sir; but what little there is is very shroong."

METHODS AND RESULTS.—Traveller: "When the grip spread through China, the Chinese doctors marched through the streets with drums and trumpets, trying to stop it." Physician: "Ha, ha, ha! What hopelessly ignorant barbarians those Chinese are! Ha, ha, ha!—ho, ho, ho! Funniest thing I've heard in a long time." "Did you have the grip in this country?" "Yes, indeed. Everybody had it." "What did you do?" "Everything that the profoundest researches and latest discoveries of modern science could suggest." "Did that stop it?" "N—o." "Neither did the drums and trumpets."

CUPID was flying irregularly between them, so to speak, as they were strolling along out Woodward Avenue last Sunday afternoon. He was feeling a good deal like a man going past a graveyard and was whistling. "I wish you wouldn't whistle," she said, pettishly. "It is positively rude." He looked at her a moment and stopped. Then he began to sing softly. He sang for, say five minutes. "Harry," she said, almost tenderly. His face lighted up with hope. "Please whistle," she said, so pleadingly, that he got on the next car and went home alone.

RUSSIA among the latest ever poss

PRINCE remarked by the whom he

A PERE spreads a the latest LORD T

more. E his son, looks poe looks, br

THE C our rou will be m Emperess him with

QUEEN subjects dred and greater palmist EVERY

Naples I charming and max appearan ber and informat

in his be with him

BEFORE come and jah of M attended in South before the crossing

MAR. dark, glo dresses e costly la literary recently

into her she is her charming

The li complete have ma be distr of the li

The li time with his part smiling with me both of v

HER WALES is by the I behalf of Manipur been receo ing the v

ions were the list is up, it w £1,000

Her Maje as the v quiet end fess abou to be int

Ir the Emperor monarch of height, E take sec

stature is Robenzol men of bi

SOCIETY.

RUSSIA's present empress is generally beloved among the people for her charities, and is said to be the most popular czarina the nation has ever possessed.

PRINCE GEORGE OF WALES, who is looking remarkably well, was eagerly welcomed home by the Prince and Princess and his sisters, whom he met at Cowes.

A PERFUME lamp, which burns cologne, and spreads a delightful scent about the room, is the latest household novelty.

LORD TENNYSON is taking a rest near Haslemere. He goes out regularly every day with his son, the Hon. Hallam Tennyson, and looks poetically picturesque, with his flowing locks, broad felt hat, and blue cloak.

THE Czarévitch reaches Russia after his tour round the world about this time. He will be met at Moscow by the Emperor and Empress, both of whom will, no doubt, receive him with great joy. His brother is still very ill.

QUEEN VICTORIA is a mighty sovereign. Her subjects foot up in round numbers three hundred and sixty-seven million. This means a greater empire than that of Rome in the palmiest days of the Cæsars.

EVERYONE who has met with the Prince of Naples has been struck by his extremely charming manners. He has all the demeanour and manners of a man of years, and the appearance of a boy. He is quick to remember and learn things, very grateful for information, and most gracious and pleasant in his bearing to those who come in contact with him.

BEFORE the year is out England is to welcome another royalty, in the wealthy Maharajah of Mysore. His departure, however, is attended by some difficulty, and certain priests in Southern India have been deputed to study the abstruse questions involved in the project before the Maharajah imperils his caste by crossing the "black water."

MRS. CARNOT is a handsome brunette, with dark, glossy hair and bright, black eyes. She dresses exquisitely, and is especially fond of costly lace. She is highly educated, and is a literary worker of no small ability, having recently translated John Stuart Mill's works into her own language. On public occasions she is the centre of attraction, and is always a charming hostess.

THE little Duke of Albany, who has just completed his seventh year, may be said to have made his first appearance in public when he distributed the prizes to the men and boys of the Esher Cottagers' Horticultural Society. The little Duke, who wore a Highland costume with the Royal Stuart tartan, performed his part with much gravity and dignity, only smiling twice—once at an old soldier covered with medals, and again at a portly policeman, both of whom were prize winners.

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS OF WALES is much gratified at the response made by the ladies of England to her appeal on behalf of Mrs. Grimwood, the heroine of Manipur. But the sum announced as having been received must not be taken as representing the whole of the fund, for many contributions were not publicly mentioned; and when the list is finally closed and the accounts made up, it will be found that considerably over £1,000 will be handed to Mrs. Grimwood. Her Majesty, it is said, is about to contribute, as she very much admires the heroism and quiet endurance of the woman who makes no fuss about herself, and has persistently refused to be interviewed.

If the little King of Spain be excepted, the Emperor of China is the shortest of male monarchs, standing as he does only five feet in height. He must, however, in point of stature, take second place to Queen Victoria, whose stature is four feet ten inches. The house of Hohenzollern boasts the greatest number of men of big stature.

STATISTICS.

ON the average there are 10,000 advertisements a week in the eight London morning papers.

127,000,000 is the number of boots and shoes said to be manufactured yearly in the United Kingdom.

IN fifty years the population of Ireland has decreased nearly three and one-half millions. In 1841 it was 8,195,124; in 1891 it is only 4,706,162.

OF ten thousand persons, one arrives at the age of one hundred years, of five hundred one attains the age of ninety, and one in one hundred lives to the age of sixty.

ONE pair of rabbits can become multiplied in four years into 1,250,000. They were introduced into Australia a few years ago, and now that colony ships six million rabbit skins yearly to Britain.

GEMS.

A MAN who is not ashamed of himself need not be ashamed of his early condition.

DON'T worry about little things. Elephants suffer more from gnats than they do from lions.

PRIDE is at the bottom of all mistakes. All the other passions do occasional good, but whenever pride puts in its word everything goes wrong, and what it might really be desirable to do quietly and innocently, it is mortally dangerous to do proudly.

THE best things are nearest; breath in your nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand. Then do not grasp at the stars, but do life's plain, common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things of life.

THERE is a kind of aid which is immoral for a friend to give and equally immoral for another to receive; it is the aid which takes the place of work we ought to have done, some energy we ought to have put forth, some strength and power of character we ought to have attained.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A SIMPLE test for the purity of coffee is: put a tablespoonful into a tumblerful of cold water, and let it stand for a while. Pure coffee does not readily impart colour to cold water, while adulterated coffee soon gives it an amber colour, gradually changing to deep brown.

GELATINE CREAM.—Cover a quarter-box of gelatine with a quarter-cup of cold water, soak a half hour; then add to it a half-cup of sugar, and a half-pint of hot milk; stir until the gelatine is dissolved; add a tablespoonful of vanilla, strain and turn in a basin to cool. When cool beat rapidly for five minutes, put into a mould in a cold place to harden.

RICE SNOW.—Four spoonfuls of ground rice, one pint of water, two spoonfuls of butter, two spoonfuls of sugar, the juice of one lemon, one pint of boiling milk. Put the rice to cook in the water, stirring well about fifteen minutes; add the butter, sugar, lemon and hot milk. Stir well, and let the whole boil until thick, then pour it into a dish.

STEAMED PUDDING.—Take one pint of flour, one heaping teaspoonful of baking powder, one half-teaspoonful of melted butter, a pinch of salt, and milk enough to make a soft dough. Roll this out half an inch thick and cover with fresh fruit or dried fruit that has been stewed and drained free of juice; sprinkle with sugar and roll, pressing the edge down and the ends together. Lay a cloth in a steamer, place the roll of dough on it, cover, and steam one hour. Serve with a sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SMALLPOX is the most infectious disease, then comes measles.

PEOPLE can feel, taste, and hear better with their eyes closed than with them open.

IN many Warwickshire villages black cats and black poultry are avoided as unlucky by the inhabitants.

IT is estimated that at least one million pounds of rubber are annually used for bicycle tires.

BERLIN has just decided that wooden pavements are a failure, while Constantinople is having its first one put down.

THE thickness of human hair varies from the two hundred and fiftieth to the six hundredth part of an inch.

IT is believed by Chinamen that cat's meat is a remedy for lung diseases. It is served in most of the Canton restaurants, cooked in various ways.

CHIMNEYS are scarce in the City of Mexico. There are not ten dwelling-houses which have them. Charcoal is the only fuel used for cooking and heating.

THE phonograph has been employed to register the conversation coming over the telephone wires, so as to keep a record of the day's business.

WHEN cut flowers have faded, either by being worn a while evening in one's dress, or as a bouquet, by cutting half an inch from the end of the stem in the morning, and putting the freshly-trimmed end instantly into quite boiling water, the petals may be seen to become quite smooth and to resume their beauty, often in a few minutes.

THE longest bridge in the world is the Lion Bridge near Sangang, in China. It extends five and one quarter miles over an area of the Yellow Sea, and is supported by 300 huge stone arches. The roadway is seventy feet above the water and is enclosed in an iron network. A marble lion twenty-one feet long rests on the crown of each pillar. The bridge was built at the command of the Emperor Kieng Long, who abdicated in 1736 on account of old age.

IT is a law of good society in China that young widows never marry again. Widowhood is, therefore, held in the highest esteem, and the older the widow grows she is more respected, and does her position become with the people. Should she reach 50 years, she may, by applying to the emperor, get a sum of money with which to buy a tablet, on which is engraved the sum of her virtues. The tablet is placed over the door at the principal entrance to her house.

THE difficulty of distinguishing certain forms of comatose sleep from actual death has suggested all sorts of ingenious tests, such as holding a looking-glass in front of the nostrils, or forcing a spray of water against the closed eyelids. A still more decisive experiment, however, consists in injecting the pale skin of the upper arm with a strong solution of ammonia. If a spark of life lingers it will betray itself by the appearance of a red spot.

POPE LEO XIII. is now in his eighty-first year. His eyes are still remarkably black and brilliant, but aside from this, he has every appearance of an infirm old man. His features are thin and sharp, his complexion very pale, and his hand trembles to such an extent, that he is no longer able to write unaided. In signing documents, he is obliged to hold the right wrist with his left hand; and even then, the result is not satisfactory. This convulsive trembling is attributed to a fever from which he suffered several years ago, and from which he has never fully recovered. The pope has seldom been seen to laugh during all of his long life. He lives plainly, eats alone, according to the established customs of popes, while he is in Rome, and is troubled with excessive nervousness which often prevents sleep.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

TRADESMAN.—Carriages used only for trade purposes are not taxable.

A WORKER.—The Bank Holiday Act was passed May 25th, 1871.

MAY.—There are bars on the medals for engagements in the Egyptian War.

BENEDICT.—Publication of banns has effect for three months.

S. P.—The Turks proper are Osmanlis. The inhabitants of Montenegro are mostly Slavs.

RECIPIENT.—Unless you take £3 "all at once" you need not use a receipt stamp.

TRETTI.—If you refer to the steamer *City of Paris* we cannot inform you.

T. B.—Pure gold is 24 carat; the sovereign is 22 carat, it weighs 6 pennyweights 15½ grains.

YANKEE.—The distance from New York to San Francisco, Cal., is 3,307 miles.

LETTIE.—Wherever you live it is customary to speak of "going up" to the capital of the country.

PRICEB.—There are no heathens now to be found in the group of Fijian Islands.

BOB.—The time lost while deserting has all to be served again, but not the time put in previous to deserting.

LADYBIRD.—Official etiquette has established the custom of using the title "Hon." in addresses like the one you mention.

RAIK.—There is in Dublin Backville-street (or O'Connell-street), the principal thoroughfare, and also Upper Backville-street.

CARINA.—Alice Rhodes was convicted and sentenced to death on September 26th, 1877, and pardoned October 30th following.

HUPERT.—The Prince of Wales and every other witness in a court of justice must take the usual oath or statutory affirmation.

INQUIRER.—Letters addressed to members of the House of Commons, Westminster, are more likely to reach them promptly than if sent to private addresses.

L. O.—A letter addressed to the War Office giving name and particulars would receive attention, and obtain the information wanted.

JONAS.—A will is revoked by a subsequent will, by marriage, or by burning, tearing, or destroying the will. It is not enough to obliterate it with a pen.

VENUS.—Venus is the brightest of all the planets. Jupiter is the next brightest. Mars looks reddish to the naked eye, but is bright when seen through a telescope.

VOLCANO.—The last eruptions of Etna of a mild character were on 22nd March and 4th April, 1883; violent and sustained eruptions with earthquakes occurred from 26th May to 7th June, 1879.

WORRIED MOTHER.—You have no legal liability for windows broken by your 20-year-old child. What your moral liability may be depends on the care taken of the child to keep him out of mischief.

CACIL.—The remains of Mr. Bradlaugh, M.P., were interred in unconsecrated ground at Brook Wood Cemetery, Woking, on Tuesday, February 3rd, 1891, in the presence of about 2,000 persons.

VIOLET.—The paper you mention is published in London every Thursday morning during the summer season, and monthly during the winter; price 2d. You can obtain it through any newsagent.

AN OLD SOLDIER.—If you have been injured during your three years' military service you can apply for a pension to the Board of Commissioners, Chelsea Hospital.

A GIDDY GIRL.—People who are subject to attacks of giddiness or faintness, and those who suffer from palpitation and other sense of discomfort at the heart, should not bathe.

JEANIE DEAR.—Loch Lomond is the largest lake in Scotland. It is twenty-four miles long. Its width varies from less than one mile to about seven miles. Its depth also varies greatly—at least from sixty to six hundred feet.

PAUL.—You must, through an agent, get a petition presented to the Sheriff for warrant to have your name changed upon the register, that is, if you wish to register it; but you are acting quite legally in using the name without registering it.

SIMPLE SIMON.—There are no apprentice stewardships; some owners require as much as £40 premium with sea apprentice, some £10, while some merely require a guarantee for the payment of a certain sum in event of the apprentice failing to fulfil his period of service; there is no limit as to age.

UNHAPPY ONE.—You should not think of going to the West Indies until you have submitted yourself to medical examination at the hands of your family doctor, with the view of ascertaining whether the climate is likely to suit you; there is no winter in that region, but a dry and a wet season—the former, lasting from June to November, the healthy season; and the latter during the other six months, the unhealthy season, when fevers prevail.

HOUSEMAID.—To get a good polish on mahogany easily, mix one part of boiled linseed-oil with two parts of alcoholic shellac varnish. Shake well before using. Apply in small quantities, with a cloth, and rub the work vigorously until the desired polish is secured.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—The moths are not in the woodwork, but in your furniture somewhere, and to get rid of them you must have a thorough turn up of everything periodically in order that the house and all in it may be thoroughly aired.

FAIR LILIAN.—As regards climate, N. Z. is and is no doubt preferable, but British Columbia is far superior in that respect to this country, and it offers at this moment fairer prospects to farmers with a little capital than New Zealand does.

EMIGRANT.—Carpenters, masons, bricklayers, and other useful mechanics; navvies and female servants may, under certain conditions, obtain assisted passages to the Cape; apply to Agent-General for Cape, 7, Albert Mansions, Victoria-street, London.

FAIR LILIAN.—A little glycerine diluted with a small quantity of fresh lemon juice will soften and whiten the skin. We know of nothing better to keep the hands in nice condition. As a toilet accessory lemon juice is almost indispensable.

LOLLYPAP.—The slave trade still exists in Central Africa and on the East Coast of the Red Sea. Vast tracts of the continent have never been explored by a European, though travellers have crossed it at many points.

MOBILITY.

True worth is in being—not seeming;
In doing each day that goes by
Some little good—not in the dreaming
Of great things to do by-and-by.
For whatever men say in blindness,
And spite of the fancies of youth,
There's nothing so kingly as kindness,
And nothing so royal as truth.

We get back our meek as we measure—
We cannot do wrong and feel right;
Nor can we give pain and gain pleasure,
For justice avenges each slight.
The air for the wing of the sparrow,
The bush for the robin and wren,
But always the path that is narrow
And straight for the children of men.

We cannot make bargains for blisses,
Nor catch them like fishes in nets;
And sometimes the thing our life misses
Helps more than the thing which it gets.
For good lieth not in pursuing,
Nor of gaining of great nor of small;
Be just in the doing, and doing,
As we would be done by, is all.

Thro' envy, thro' malice, thro' hating,
Against the world early and late,
No lot of courage abating—
Our part is to work and to wait;
And slight is the sting of his trouble
Whose winnings are less than his worth;
For he who is honest is noble,
Whatever his fortunes or birth.

R. W. W.

CORRY.—"I and F. Royal Artillery." 1. Certainly not. The only object would be to gain forgiveness, and they have no power to grant this. You might just as well come to me or I to you. 2. Roman Catholics are very different.

SPIDER.—No way to get rid of spiders in the house but to brush down the walls frequently, wash and clean windows and corners; every corner in the house should be turned over at least once a week, and spiders won't find it comfortable for them, and will certainly clear out.

A PEST.—An article infested with moths can be dipped in benzine; it kills them, but does not injure the article; then a device for catching moths is to damp a common brick and keep it damp; raise it about the thickness of a penny piece from the floor; the moths collect under it, and once or twice a week can be killed.

INDIGNATION.—These advertisements are shameless frauds; in most cases the valuable security offered is a pawn ticket for a gold watch said to be pledged at half its value, but which on being redeemed is found to be scant value for the sum advanced upon it, and made for the pawnshop; have nothing to do with these offers.

ROBY.—About the only publication obtainable regarding Buenos Ayres just now is the quarterly warning against emigration to that and other districts of South America issued by the Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W.; write there; do not think of going to the Argentine just now.

F. B.—You cannot distrain on the premises to which the goods were removed, unless the removal was secret, in which case you can follow and distrain within thirty days. In the case you state, however, the goods appear to be claimed as the property of another person, so that it will be dangerous for you to act without legal advice.

GEORGE.—Taking the length of the permanent way on the surface of the globe at nearly 60,000 geographical miles, with a daily average of ten trains, it is estimated that the total loss by wear and tear suffered each day by the metallic rails of the earth is about 600 tons. The 600 tons of iron are lost in the form of a fine powder, and are carried back to the earth in the shape of soluble iron salts.

CURIOSITY.—The Breches Bible received its name from the curious translation of Genesis III. 7: "And they sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves breeches." The first edition was published in Geneva in 1582.

FOOTBALL.—We do not quite understand what you want. Of course football is a "lawful" game, in the sense that there is no law against playing football, but all the same it may be prohibited to members of a particular friendly society; and if it is, then a member who plays football of course forfeits all benefit.

LYDIA.—The Orient, as usually meant in this country, comprises Turkey, Asia Minor, the Holy Land and Arabia. A person travelling in India, Farther India, China, Japan and Siberia, is commonly spoken of as travelling through those countries, and not as "travelling through the Orient."

MUSICAL.—The first piano known in England, about 1757, was made by an English monk at Rome. It was not until 1767 that it was first introduced on the stage of Covent Garden Theatre, London, as "a new instrument," according to a playbill bearing date of that year. The earliest entry of a piano on the books of Broadwood & Co. occurs under date of 1771: of a grand piano, 1781.

CURIOSITY.—Looking at the situation from the business point of view, which is the proper side from which to consider it, we think that the husband is in the right. But as all the money in the concern belongs to the wife, it is natural for her to wish to have a voice in the control of it. The situation is an unfortunate one for the husband.

A DANCER.—The polka, a dance first known in Eastern Bohemia, was introduced in 1835 at P. & Co., and performed by Raab, a Bohemian dancing-master at the Odeon Theatre in Paris, in 1840. There are various modifications of it, which have been made from time to time. The name is supposed to be derived from Bohemian, *polka*, half, from the half step prevalent in it.

SCOTCH LAD.—As far as climate is concerned you have nothing to fear from that; indeed you would probably improve in health under it; but the place you name is very far indeed from Brazil, and you would have no greater chance of employment at your trade there than in Kilmarnock or Linlithgow, for instance; you might find opening in another line, however.

MYRTLE.—The myrtle was sacred to Venus, and her temples were surrounded by groves of it. The victors in the Olympic games were crowned with wreaths of its leaves. The common myrtle of Europe is a shrub which grows to the height of twelve or fifteen feet. It has bright, shining leaves, and bears single white or pink flowers and black berries.

PROFESSOR.—If a man gives no other guarantee of his ability than putting "Professor" to his name, that amounts to nothing at all; any one can adopt that title: the only recognised medical titles in this country are M.D., M.B., and M.C.; the letters you give have no medical significance at all, nor is the man who sports them a duly qualified medical practitioner.

LAURIE.—Take all the clothes you have with you to South Africa, but add two light duck or cotton suits; the regulation outfit is two pairs boots, one strong suit, two pairs of white or light tweed trousers, jacket of same material, cloth cap, broad straw hat, clippers or canvas shoes, one overcoat, and at least half-a-dozen of each article of underclothing; (3) 36 to 38 days.

DEFAULTER.—Default, in law, is in a general sense the omission of any act which a party ought to do in order to entitle him to a legal remedy. Such is, for example, non-appearance in court on a day arranged. If a plaintiff in an action make default in appearance he is defaulted; if a defendant, judgment by default passes against him. Suffering judgment by default is taken for an admission of the contract alleged by the plaintiff.

STELLA.—Tortoise-shell is softened by putting it into boiling water. It is then easily moulded or pressed into shape. When it is to be inlaid with mother-of-pearl, gold, silver, etc., the pieces to be inlaid are put in their proper places on the shell, previously softened by warming, and the whole is then screwed up in a press until the pieces are forced into the shell. The filings and clippings of the shell are often made use of by being softened and pressed into moulds.

NINA.—Myrrh, which is brought chiefly from Arabia and Abyssinia, is the hardened juice of several kinds of shrubs or small trees which grow in those countries, and is at first light yellow, but when dry reddish brown. It is used in medicine as a tonic, to dress wounds that are slow of healing, and as a tooth powder to rub the gums with when they are spongy or sore. Myrrh has a sharp, bitter taste, but it is an agreeable-smelling gum resin.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 357, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LVII, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

WE CANNOT UNDERTAKE TO RETURN REJECTED MANUSCRIPTS.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. B. SPURK. And Printed by WOODFALL AND KINGSLEY, 75 to 76, LONG ACRE, W.C.